

RAMSEY COUNTY

# History

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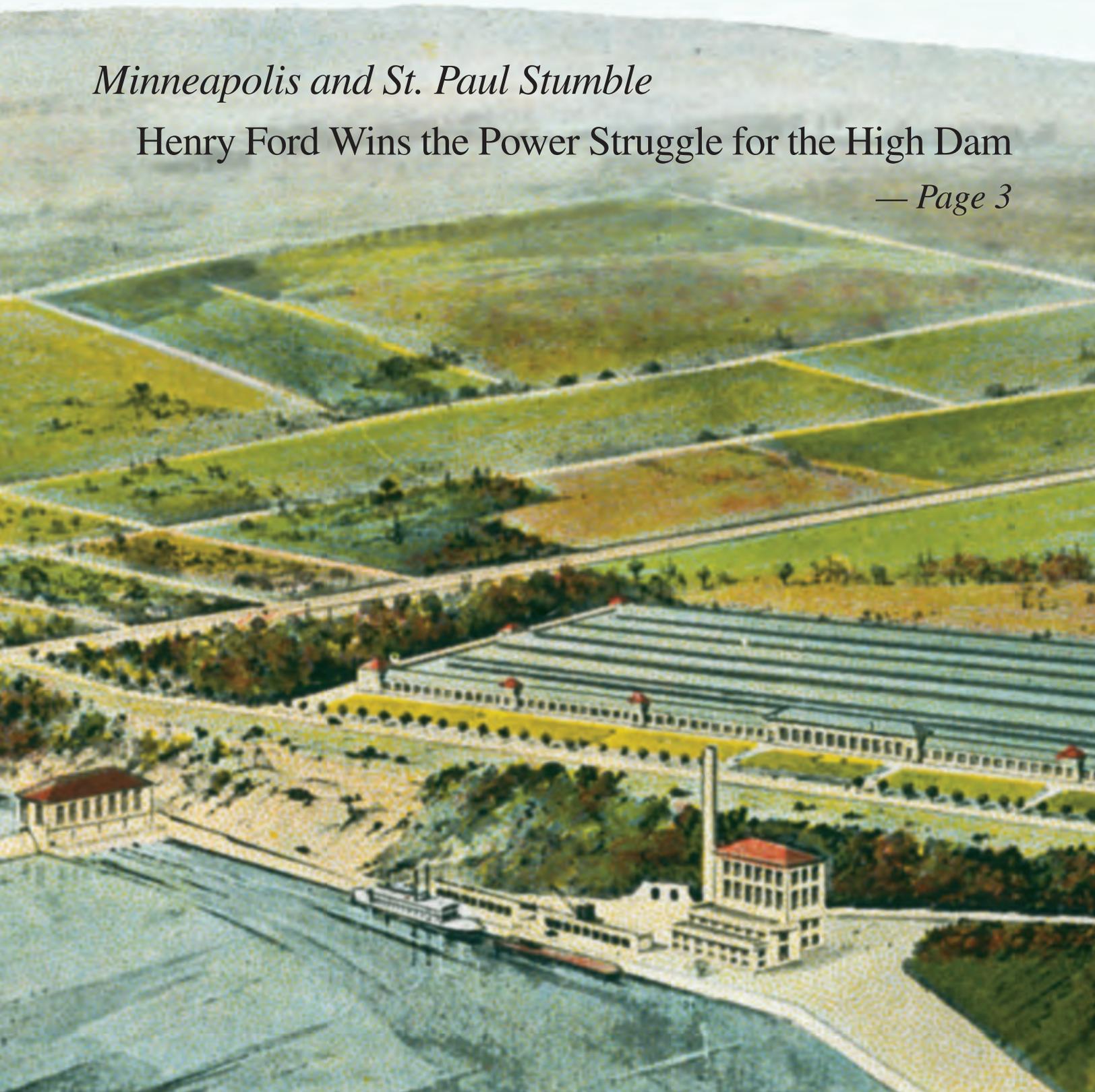
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Volume 42, Number 2

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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

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# *Mystery in the Library*

## The Bishop Jade Books and the St. Paul Public Library

*Biloiné W. Young*

**W**e do not think of libraries, those most transparent of institutions, as harboring mysteries.<sup>1</sup> These quiet rooms, presided over by soft-spoken librarians, appear in their essence, much the same as they did when we were children. Despite the recent addition of rows of computers, libraries remain predictable, comfortable presences in our lives. Unless we are referring to the shelves of novels, the idea that a library would harbor mysteries is an unlikely thought. Nevertheless the Saint Paul Public Library does.

On the balmy spring night of April 27, 1915, patrons of the Bosalis & Papas Confectionary Store in downtown Saint Paul were enjoying an evening snack

when Sam Craidone, who had been stirring up a batch of candy in the basement kitchen, suddenly raced up the wooden steps shouting “Fire.”

The candy store was housed in the Market House, one of the largest and oldest buildings in Saint Paul that had, over the years, served as the seat of government for the fledging capitol city, a temporary court house and as the site of the sprawling market where farmers and growers sold their animals and produce. By 1915, the first floor of the Market House sported an assortment of businesses from Sharood’s Shoe Store to Boe’s Millinery, Toumley’s Cigar Store and, fatefully, the Bosalis & Papas Confectionary Store. The second story of the



*This newspaper photograph captures the destruction that the April 27, 1915, fire caused to Market House, which was then the home of the St. Paul Public Library. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



As this photograph shows, the fire left the interior of Market House in a shambles. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

building housed the 158,000-book Saint Paul Public Library.

Upon hearing the cry “Fire,” patrons of the candy store grabbed tables and chairs and carried them out to the sidewalk. Sam Craidone staggered out with the cash register. By the time the fire department’s equipment arrived and aimed a stream of water on the fire, the Market House was engulfed in smoke and flames. A crowd, estimated at 25,000, gathered to watch the spectacular fire.

### **The Bishop Jade Books**

Among the spectators were John Conway and Clarence Thompkins. The two men were watching helplessly as Saint Paul’s library went up in smoke when they suddenly remembered and resolved to save the “Jade Books.” The Jade Books were a two-volume set entitled *Investigations*

and *Studies In Jade* printed in 1904 on handmade paper. The press run consisted of only 100 copies and after the books were printed the type was scattered and all of the plates used in preparation of the books destroyed.

The books told the story of every piece of jade in the collection that Heber R. Bishop had announced in May 1902 he was donating to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Each volume of the set was said to weigh about 100 pounds. Before his death in December, Bishop had drawn up a list specifying to whom every set of his books were to be given. He gave one set to the British Museum, another set to the Prince of Wales, and—unaccountably—set number 27 to Saint Paul’s Public Library.

Clarence Thompkins was the superintendent of the Market House building and

knew of an unused stairway to the second floor. Though the building was in flames, the two men made their way upstairs, broke through windows and storage crates, and found the two books. As they started back the way they had come, they were almost overcome by smoke and, to avoid the fumes, crawled out of the burning building on their hands and knees. Their efforts saved the books. Neither the gold leaf on the cover nor the scarlet watered-silk linings was marred. Only a deep scratch on the red leather binding of Volume One attested to the struggle the men had to bring those weighty books out of the burning building.

The *Pioneer Press*, in a search for heroes and a good story, claimed in its account of the fire that the Jade Books were the only library volumes saved. That was not correct.

The Saint Paul Public Library's *Annual Report* for 1915 states that, of the 158,180 books in the library's collection, 33,793 escaped the fire. Of these, 13,218 were in the schools, 12,734 were in the branches and stations, 7,143 were in the hands of library borrowers, 73 were in storage, 719 had been stored elsewhere, 615 were at the bindery and 8,458 were "salvaged."

The Bishop Jade Books were considered of sufficient importance in 1915 for two men to risk their lives to rescue them, and the newspaper to single them out as the only books saved from the fire. Decades later they were housed for a time in a rare book room at the Highland Branch Library, established as a memorial to the memory of head librarian Perrie Jones. When Highland was remodeled, the rare book room was closed and the books faded from public memory. There was no further mention of the Jade Books for eighty years until they were sold in the mid 1990s along with a collection of rare books owned by the library.

### **How Did a Set Come to St. Paul?**

The central mystery is how did copy number 27 of the 100 copies that were published of the Jade Books end up in the Saint Paul Public Library? The Bishop Jade Book is not an ordinary two-volume set of books. Formally titled *Investigations and Studies in Jade*, it remains one of the rarest and most costly sets of books ever published in the United States. No copies were sold nor were any given to private individuals—not even to members of Bishop's family. Copies went to the crowned heads of Europe and to important institutions.

Heber Reginald Bishop was a friend and big-game hunting partner of Theodore Roosevelt who made his first fortune raising sugar cane in Cuba. When revolution drove him off the island he invested in the new technology of railroads. He was a leader in the building of New York's famous Third Avenue elevated railway and went on to become a major stockholder in the New York and Manhattan Elevated Railway companies.

Railroads required prodigious amounts of iron, which led Bishop to invest in the

great iron resources in the Duluth region. He was president, in 1887 of the Minnesota Iron Company as well as the Duluth & Iron Range Railway Company.

One of the nineteenth century's major gilded-age industrialists, Bishop had another side to his personality—that of art connoisseur.<sup>2</sup> He began by collecting Japanese bronzes and swords, the elaborate silk robes worn by Chinese and Japanese nobles. He purchased and gave to the Metropolitan Museum the great Haida canoe, which measures sixty-four feet long and eight feet wide and was hollowed from a single tree.



*Heber Reginald Bishop*

Though these collections were extensive and extraordinary, his greatest collection, begun in mid-life, was of jade. Bishop fell passionately and obsessively in love with jade.

### **Heber Bishop and Collecting Jade**

His fascination with jades was kindled by his purchase of the Hurd vase from Tiffany and Company in 1878. The Hurd vase is considered to be among the finest jade objects ever to leave China. The vase was seized by Anglo-French troops who looted the Peking summer palace in 1860. (The concept of repatriation of stolen national treasures had not yet occurred to westerners so the looters—and

Tiffany's—greatly benefited from the raid.) For Bishop, who had the means to indulge his extraordinary sensitivity to works of art, buying the Hurd vase marked the turning point in his extraordinary career as a collector.

In 1892 Bishop went to Japan and China for the first time at the age of fifty-two, where he added to what was already becoming an extensive collection of jade carvings. His trip to the Orient alerted him to the existence of many other choice specimens. He would follow the wanderings of a single piece for years until he was able to purchase it. Not all of the pieces were small. Bishop acquired the only known crystal of jadeite, which weighed 4,715 pounds. He did not restrict his buying to the Orient but bought jade from all over the world. His collection, which was then displayed in the ballroom of his home, grew until it became the largest and most complete jade collection in the world, exceeding even that in the British Museum.<sup>3</sup>

### **Making the Catalog**

As he grew older, Bishop realized that his jade collection was too important and valuable to leave in private hands so he donated it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art after contributing \$55,000 to build a special room to house it. Along with this money, Bishop donated the cases in which he had displayed his collection and stipulated that the room at the museum in which the jades were to be exhibited should be a reproduction of his own ballroom. His final act was to create his two-volume catalog of the collection. To supervise the work on the books Bishop hired famed gemologist George F. Kunz, who would later be one of the founders of Tiffany's. To write and illustrate the books he engaged oriental watercolorists, engravers, professors of mineralogy and ethnography and curators of the Smithsonian and Peabody museums.

The two heavy volumes, each twenty-five inches high, bound in red leather with watered silk linings, contain hundreds of in-text illustrations. There is a portrait of Bishop and scores of plates representing painstaking work by numerous artists in several media, including thirteen original

watercolor drawings by Li Shih-ch'uan on six plates, thirty-six colored lithographs, thirty-one copperplate engravings, and seventeen woodcuts. The entire project took twenty years to complete and cost Bishop almost a quarter of a million dollars, making the Jade Books among the most expensive books ever published in the United States.

Though he supervised the work himself, Bishop did not live to see the completion of his task. As he lay on his deathbed, a victim of heart disease, he drew up the list of the institutions and royal families around the world that he wanted to receive a copy. Two sets of the volumes went to the U.S. government for registering the books' copyright leaving ninety-eight sets to be distributed. In the intervening hundred and one years, only three or four copies have ever been deaccessioned by the institutions to which they were given. One copy, which came into the possession of a firm in Holland, is priced at 75,000 euros.

The Saint Paul Public Library, destination of copy number 27, was the westernmost institution that received any set of the Jade Books. What was Heber Bishop's tie to St. Paul that he would send a copy of his masterwork to this library? Who was his local friend? Though he and James J. Hill must have known each other—Hill was a younger man and both were tycoons who invested in railroads in Minnesota—there is no record of a Bishop-Hill friendship. While Bishop was amassing his jade collection in New York, Hill was preoccupied with driving his Great Northern Railroad to the Pacific. Bishop died in 1902 in New York and Hill did not become involved in the financing and building of a library in St. Paul until 1911.

### Another Mystery

The presence of the Bishop Jade Books in St. Paul is not the only mystery the Public Library has harbored in its 125 years. Everyone in St. Paul thought they knew well their capable head librarian, Dr. William Dawson Johnston, who presided over the library for seven years. He had had a distinguished but not an unusual career, graduating from Brown University and later from Harvard with a master's degree

in history. In 1900 he began work at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where he was the author of *History of the Library of Congress, Volume 1*. In 1911 Rutgers College conferred a doctor of literature degree on Johnston for his work as a librarian and writer.<sup>4</sup>

When the St. Paul's City Council went looking for the best head librarian it could find, it succeeded when it convinced William Dawson Johnston to come to St. Paul. He amply repaid the city's faith in



*This 1905 photograph conveys the splendor of the room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City that housed the Bishop Jade Collection. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

him by increasing the library membership by 4,000 patrons in his first year. He not only saw to the building of Central Library across from Rice Park, but also supervised the construction of the three Carnegie libraries in the city. When he came to St. Paul, the city had one burned-out library at the Market House. When he left the city had four beautiful library buildings and usage was among the highest in the United States.

St. Paul residents thought they knew all about their head librarian. They did not. When Dr. Johnston rode out of St. Paul in 1921 to take over a library in Paris, France, the calling cards in his pocket did not bear the name of William Dawson Johnston. Instead they read, "Sir William Johnston-Gordon." Unbeknownst to probably everyone in St. Paul, their head librarian was an English knight, bearer of an inherited title.

The mystery of who brought the Bishop Jade Books to St. Paul remains. Thanks to two brave men, these rare and singular books did not burn up in the

great library fire. Dr. William Dawson Johnston was not so fortunate. His completed book manuscript *A History of University Libraries* went up in the flames of his office that April night in 1915 and he did not have a copy. Johnston's book was lost and Bishop's were saved. Through the books they created, the lives of two remarkable men touched that night leaving behind, for us, the enduring mystery of their ties to St. Paul.

*Biloiné W. (Billie) Young is a long-time resident of St. Paul who has written several books on local and national history. In 2004 she published River of Conflict, River of Dreams: Three Hundred Years of the Upper Mississippi. Later this year Afton Historical Society Press will publish her book My Heart Is Delicious: Setting the Course for Cross-Cultural Health Care; the Story of the Center for International Health.*

### Notes

1. Most of the material for this article comes from my forthcoming book, *A Noble Task: The St. Paul Public Library Celebrates 125!* to be published by the Afton Historical Society Press in the fall of 2007.
2. Material on Bishop comes from the biographical information found in the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 22 (New York: James T. White & Co., 1932), 14–15 and *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 1, 1897–1942 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co., 1942), 98.
3. A detailed account of how Bishop acquired his jade collection and what went into the preparation of the Jade Books is in George Frederick Kunz, "Heber Reginald Bishop and His Jade Collection," *American Anthropologist*, new series, 5:1 (January-March 1903): 111–117.
4. See Hella R. Havens, "Development of the Saint Paul Public Library" (a paper prepared for the Division of Library Instruction, University of Minnesota, 1930, in the archives of the Saint Paul Public Library) and "Farewell Reception at Saint Paul for Dr. Johnston," *Library Journal*, 46 (November 15, 1921): 941. To see several photographs of the bindings and selected interior pages of one set of Bishop Jade Books, see <http://www.prbm.com/special/adventure/jadebks.htm>.

*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".*

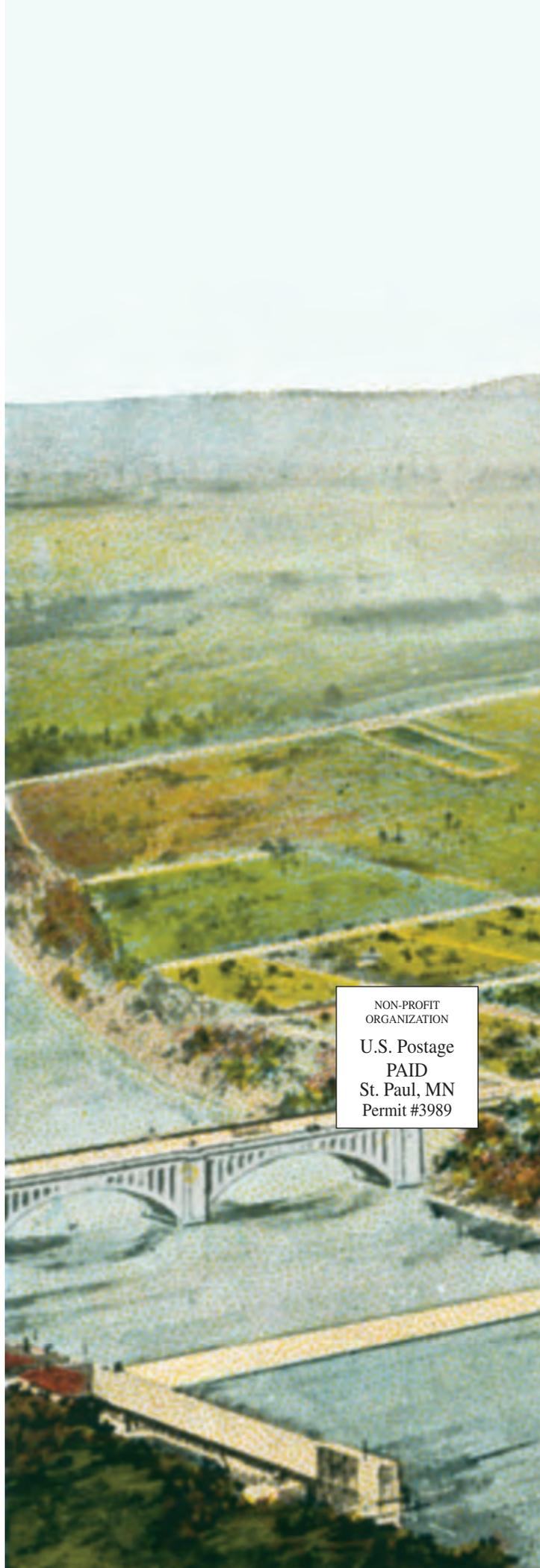
*The image on the cover is taken from a postcard of the early 1920s, showing the stately Ford Twin Cities Assembly Plant sitting atop the beautiful bluffs of the Mississippi River. This factory is the virtual embodiment of the classical image of the "machine in the garden" popularized by a book with 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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