

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Summer 2008

Volume 43, Number 2

On Courage and Cowards
The Controversy Surrounding
Macalester College's Neutrality
and Peace Association, 1917

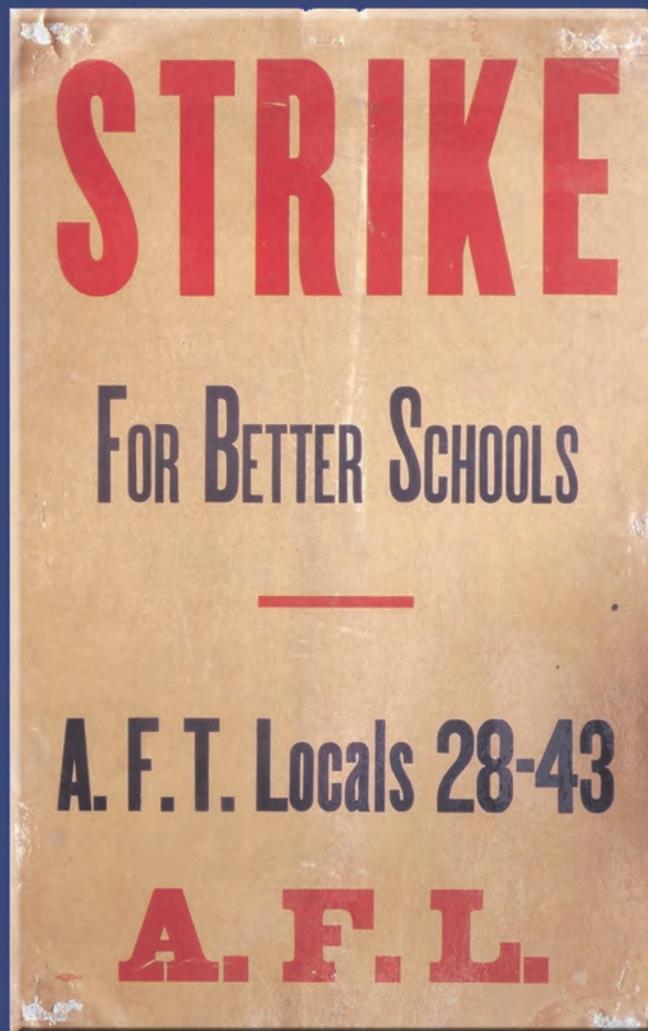
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Strike for Better Schools

The St. Paul Public Schools Teachers' Strike of 1946

Cheryl Carlson

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This strike notice was one of many that St. Paul's public school teachers carried in the 1946 teachers' strike, the first strike by teachers in the United States. It is reproduced here by permission of Local 28, American Federation of Teachers.

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Volume 43, Number 2

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes, current events remind us of our own past experiences. But history can provide perspective on the present as well. In these times, confronted with tough school levy and budget issues, we can read Cheryl Carlson's article on the St. Paul teachers' strike of 1946 and see when times were really bad: St. Paul elementary classrooms had up to fifty students and some had no soap or towels in the bathrooms. An outdated and corrupt city-based funding system, an uninterested business community, and families who sent one-third of St. Paul's children to nonpublic schools made a "perfect storm" for inadequate funding. But with the strike, teachers, administrators, and students worked together to apply pressure, leading ultimately to St. Paul's adoption of the current independent school district model. In the same vein, Emily Skidmore's article on the Macalester Neutrality and Peace Association points up a passionate disagreement on the merits of the United States' entry into World War I in 1917, much as the current debate goes on over U.S. involvement in the Middle East. But sentiment quickly turned to strong support once Congress voted in favor of the country joining the conflict in Europe.

Patricia Hampl's *The Florist's Daughter*, along with a number of other recent titles reviewed in this issue, offer a bouquet of books for summer (or fall!) reading: histories of a pioneering Native American interpreter and legislator, the St. Paul Public Library, the German-founded brewing industry, and the streetcar era in the Twin Cities. Diverse, entertaining, and great reads.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Growing Up in St. Paul

Love in Bloom

John L. Relf

This Growing Up in St. Paul is an excerpt from John L. Relf's My Story, which he published in 2007. It is reprinted here with the permission of John L. Relf with some brief explanatory additions. The parents of John Relf were Catherine Hall Stickney and Kenneth Attwood Relf, both of whom lived in St. Paul, where John Relf was born in 1927. He grew up in a home on Portland Avenue, one block off of Summit near Fairview Avenue and attended Ramsey and Maria Sanford Junior High Schools. John Relf then went on to Central High School. Following graduation in 1945, he enlisted in the army, served eighteen months of active duty in the United States, and was discharged in time to enroll at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis in early 1947. John Relf graduated from the university in 1950 with a B.A. in business administration. In 1951 he became active in the Young Republicans, supporting their presidential candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

After meeting Marge [Darrington] at the Young Republican meeting in September of 1952, I dated her many times, either going out to dinner or a movie or just taking an evening walk with our family dog, Ensign. 1764 Portland, only two blocks from 1861 Portland [where John Relf lived], was just too close. We often went out with her roommates, Pat Glass, Mary Jo Deutz, Kay Towey, and Dorothy Patton, and their friends. We also got together with Dee and Jim Brown and Winnie and Jim Bettenberg for a beer and conversation. By December, I asked Marge to marry me, and we soon found ourselves picking out an engagement ring at Bockstruck's Jewelry Store in St. Paul. We didn't tell anyone until Valentine's Day in 1953, when I formally gave her the ring and we set the wedding day for June 27th at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Stillwater, Marge's hometown. Marge chose her sister, Doris Ingraham, to be her matron of honor and I asked Ed Reid to be best man and Bill Duquette and Scott Shelton to be ushers. Since I wasn't Catholic, although we went to instructions at St. Mark's Church, we couldn't have Mass. We set the wedding for 2 PM and the reception afterward at the White Pine Inn in Bayport.

The day was a little cloudy with light rain, but the church seemed to be filled with relatives and friends, including my parents and Marge's parents. My grandmother, Marnie Relf, was there along with Judy and other aunts and cousins. Marge's aunts from Eau Claire and many of her girlfriends were there also. After the reception we drove to the Duluth Hotel for our wedding night. The next day we arrived at Bear Paw Lodge on Washburn Lake near Emily, Minnesota. After a week

in one of their lakeside cabins, thinking that we had not behaved like newlyweds, we checked out with the comment, "We hope you had a nice honeymoon." They gave us a breadboard.

Our first home was a one-room apartment at 1311 Grand Avenue in St. Paul. We had a Murphy bed in the living room and a small kitchen and dining area. It was furnished, but we bought a glass-top coffee table from the Dillingham collection at Cardozo's furniture store. Nine or ten

months after we moved in, it was apparent that we were pregnant. Shortly after we discovered that, Marge suffered severe stomach pains which turned out to be appendicitis. The doctors thought it might be a tubal pregnancy and did exploratory surgery which resulted in the loss of the baby a few weeks later. We wanted to start our family in a regular house, so we started looking around for a better place to bring a baby into the world.

We found it when we saw a house with a contemporary design in a "Living for Young Homemakers" magazine. The builder was Robert Norsen, in Bloomington, and we could easily go out there to see one of his homes. The living center—kitchen, dining, and living areas—were light and open with large, floor-to-ceiling windows. The larger bedroom was designed with large windows, too, and the children's rooms were two rooms in one with a Modern fold door to separate them. The eight large windows, cathedral ceilings, and open plan helped to make the rooms look larger than they were. The design called for cork floors, tiled ceilings, and a walkout lower level. We just needed a place to build it. One day on the way to Stillwater we noticed a sign advertising lots for sale just three miles east of White Bear Lake on Highway 96. I said, "We could never afford to live here, but let's look anyway." The lots were about an acre in size and planted with many large pine trees. We called the main office in Minneapolis and met the owner of the Pine Tree Hill property, Stanley Dwinell, who showed us around. The most expensive lot was \$3,900 and the cheapest \$1,750. We thought we could afford \$2,100. We asked Norsen how much it would cost to build his house on our lot with a walkout basement and screen porch added. We could afford \$18,750, the best investment we ever made! The only piece of furniture

we owned before we moved in August 17, 1954, was the coffee table we bought for our apartment on Grand Avenue. We matched that with Dillingham living, dining, and bedroom furniture, most of which we still use, more than fifty years later.

Stanley Dwinnell, owner of both the Pine Tree Hill property and the land north of Highway 96 to Pine Tree Lake, was a real character and a gentleman. He lived alone in an apartment in Minneapolis. His business was lending money to banks. My father ran into him once when Dwinnel reviewed the troops of Battery B [of the First Minnesota Artillery Regiment, which was known as the “Gopher Gunners”] before they left to serve under General [John J.] Pershing in the Mexican War [1916–17].

Stanley was interested in the people who bought his property, and if you worked for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing [John Relf began working for 3M in 1950] you were OK. He would host cocktail parties for new residents every once in a while. They were formal affairs in his little cottage across the highway. A man in a tux served cocktails and high balls only, with no hors d’oeuvres or crackers. Later as Pine Tree Hills grew, we organized dinners at a country club or restaurant for all of the residents of Pine Tree Hills. Sometimes Stanley would ride his horse around the area, and once he stopped in and asked if Marge had a cookie for an old bachelor. He would sometimes give us a basket of apples from his orchard in Washington or a bouquet of flowers. When our Cathy, the first child born in Pine Tree Hills, arrived, he gave her a sterling silver spoon.

We were no sooner settled in our new home than our first child; Catherine Louise arrived on February 14, 1955, Valentine’s Day. I tried to call our friend, Ed Holtz, but his line was busy because he was trying to call me to let us know their daughter had arrived at the same time. Then in June of 1956 our second daughter, Susan Jane, arrived. Marge said, “I’m not going anywhere until one of these is walking,” because Cathy preferred to scoot around on her seat. About this time Mother and Dad Relf bought a summer cabin on Yellow Lake near Webster, Wisconsin. For the next eight or nine years



Marge and John Relf on their wedding day, June 27, 1953. Photo courtesy of the author.

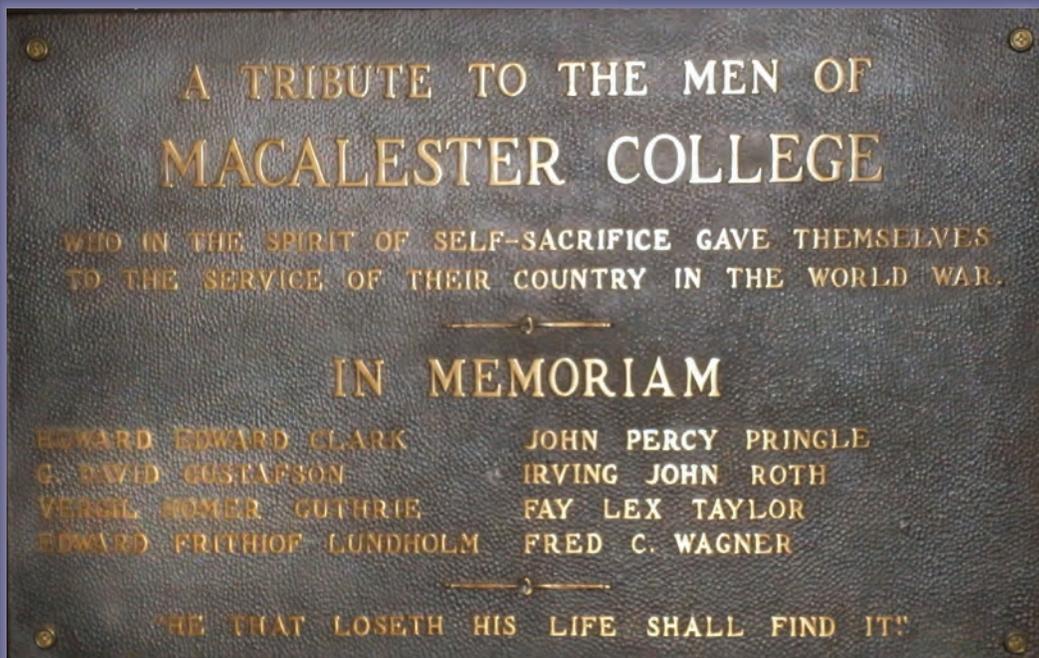
we spent our summer vacations and a lot of weekends there, boating, swimming, and bird watching. It was great for us and for the grandparents. In October of 1958 our youngest daughter, Margaret Mary arrived. We decided to call her Marnie because we liked the name before discovering that was the way my grandmother, “Monnie” Relf, spelled her name, pronounced with her New Hampshire accent. Marnie learned to walk early on and she was very active trying to keep up with her older sisters.

We were concerned because there were very few families in Pine Tree Hills with children for our daughters to play with and I tried to advertise the lots. Fortunately Bill and Joy Ringold built a house not too far away, and their two daughters were about the same age as our three. They became good friends even though they attended different schools. Bill and Joy became our good friends, too. The neighborhood started to fill up with many young parents. We began to socialize with the Chapmans, Ringolds, Fritchies, Menzels, Ogrens, and others. During the hot summer days the mothers would take their children down to the “Pine Tree Beach” on White Bear Lake, just a mile from our house on the penin-

sula, where they would sunbathe while the kids played. Looking back, it really was an idyllic life. Birthdays were shared with children in the neighborhood, and several times we hired a horse-drawn wagon at Christmas time to sing carols to the neighbors in Pine Tree Hills.

Since we had only one car, I needed to find a ride into 3M whenever Marge needed the car for doctor’s appointments or shopping. First I would get a ride from Harold Larkin, Bill Goyer, and Roy Tegeder in Mahtomedi; then later I carpooled with Art Ahlbrecht, next door, and Bill Ringold. Eventually, in 1964 we bought a second car, a Dodge Dart, and we could both go places separately, especially with my responsibilities in Republican politics and later the school board.

Still, being interested in politics, whether local or national, I suggested to a friend Bob Larson that he should be a write-in candidate for Justice of Peace in Lincoln Township. Marge and I wrote his name in, and when the votes were counted ours were the only two votes he received. Bob went on to serve as Justice of the Peace and later Mayor of Lincoln Township, all because of our two votes. One evening, several years later in 1961, I visited the Town Board meeting, just to see what might be of interest. Much to my surprise, I discovered that they were planning to put in water and sewer for all the homes, including those in Pine Tree Hills. To do this they needed to get thirty names on a petition to incorporate the township into a city. I discussed this prospect with a neighbor, John Kruse, and we agreed that it would be very expensive for the residents of Pine Tree Hills because of our large lot sizes and the distances to the main interceptor. We went to the Dellwood council meeting that night at the home of the mayor, Herb Galloway, and requested to be annexed to Dellwood. The council agreed to annex the property south of Highway 96, which was paved, if we could get over half the property owners to sign a petition to annex to Dellwood. Within a few weeks we had the needed signatures of almost all the Pine Tree Hills residents before Lincoln Town could get their thirty signatures to incorporate. Since then, our address has been 13 Overlook Road, Dellwood.



Sometime after the Armistice of November 11, 1918, Macalester College honored those members of its community who gave their lives in the service of the United States during World War I. The college mounted this bronze plaque in Old Main hall. Photo courtesy of Emily Skidmore. See Emily Skidmore's article on page 14.

R.C.H.S.
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