

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Summer 2010

Volume 45, Number 2

*“A Rented House Is Not
a Home”*

Thomas Frankson:
Real Estate Promoter
and Unorthodox Politician

Roger Bergerson

—Page 13

“He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful”

Louis W. Hill and Glacier National Park

Biloine W. Young with Eileen R. McCormack

Page 3



As part of his campaign to promote travel to Glacier National Park on the trains of the Great Northern Railway, Louis W. Hill hired Winhold Reiss (1880–1953) to paint portraits of the Blackfeet Indians who lived in that part of Montana. This 1927 portrait shows Lazy Boy, Glacier National Park, in his medicine robes. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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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.

CONTENTS

- 3 “*He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful*”
Louis W. Hill and Galcier National Park
Biloiné W. Young and Eileen R. McCormack
- 13 “*A Rented House Is Not A Home*”
Thomas Frankson: Real Estate Promoter
and Unorthodox Politician
Roger Bergerson
- 24 *A Saint Paul Chronicle*
The Return of the “Black Maria”
Maya J. Beecham

27 Book Review

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A Message from the Editorial Board

James J. Hill built the Great Northern Railway as a freight line to carry America’s cargo. But his son, Louis W. Hill, attracted passengers to take the train to a new, grand destination: Glacier National Park. This issue contains an excerpt from the Ramsey County Historical Society’s new book, where Billie Young and Eileen McCormack tell the fascinating story of how the younger Hill developed the park as a tourist mecca, complete with Swiss-chalet-style housing, luring vacationers to its grand vistas. The article also delineates Hill’s complex relationship with the Blackfoot tribe, whom he simultaneously took advantage of and supported as he sought to popularize the park’s Indian heritage. For a perspective on Native Americans in Minnesota history, read Mary Lethert Wingerd’s new book, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*, insightfully reviewed here by Professor Gwen Westerman. We are lucky to have Wingerd as a member of the Editorial Board of this magazine. This issue also contains Roger Bergerson’s biography of the Midway area’s real estate developer and politician, Thomas Frankson, and Maya Beecham’s vignette of the St. Paul Police Department’s famous “Black Maria,” horse-drawn paddy wagon, which is still available for public viewing. Enjoy!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

A Saint Paul Chronicle

The Return of the “Black Maria”

Maya J. Beecham

“As a small boy I would crawl up onto grandpa’s knee and listen to tales about when he drove the Black Maria in the rough and tumble days of St. Paul. Sad to say those stories faded away, but the name Black Maria came up often as I listened to papa and grandpa talk.” This is an excerpt from a letter written to the Saint Paul Police Public Relations Office, on January 10, 1986, by then seventy-seven-year-old Bernard M. Schorn Jr., who was reminiscing about his grandfather, Patrolman Michael J. Schorn, who served as a driver of the workhouse-van back at the turn of the century.¹

In the early 1990s the familiar moniker “Black Maria,” which had been displayed on the sides of St. Paul’s original horse-drawn paddy-wagon since its years in a Silver Springs, Florida, museum, was returned to its original name, the Saint Paul Police Workhouse-Van.

“The name ‘Black Maria’ as applied to the closed police vans used to convey prisoners to jail is a term of New England origin; the story connected with it being that many years ago in Boston, there lived a black woman named Maria Lee, who kept a lodging house for sailors. It was a waterfront place in the North End, where brawls were frequent. Maria, who was a powerful person, won a reputation for her ability to quell fights and bring offenders to jail. So successful was she in handling tough characters that the police frequently enlisted her aid in bringing malefactors to book, and the story goes that when police wagons came into use, the police, remembering the great help the black woman had given them, immortalized her name in the term ‘Black Maria.’”² In Saint Paul’s frontier days, its version was a horse-drawn wagon borrowed in the evenings from a local grocer.

In 1897, the Saint Paul Police Department purchased its own Black Maria (workhouse-van), drawn by a team of draft horses, that transported prisoners from the old courthouse on Wabasha, be-

tween Fourth and Fifth streets, to the city workhouse at Lake Como. The department purchased its enclosed van for \$300, which was built by the Mitsch and Heck Wagon Company located at Fifth and Main streets in St. Paul. The firm, formed in 1892 by two German immigrants, Mathias Heck and Lorenz Mitsch, made carriages and later automobiles.³ The wagon’s outward appearance was substantial. It measured twenty-four feet in

length, from the tip of the wagon tongue to the rear step, had an overall height of almost ten feet, and the passenger cabin, itself, was 7½ feet long by 4½ feet wide. The wheels were almost as tall as the boys that chased it down the street. Made of wood and metal, St. Paul’s workhouse-van weighed a full ton, and had a capacity of up to twelve passengers. There were two built-in compartments, one for men and one for women, separated from the driver’s seat.⁴

Although surviving records do not provide an exact date when the carriage was retired from service, it was probably replaced by a motor-driven unit sometime after 1914, the year the city started replacing its horse-drawn patrol wagons with motorized vehicles. Some documents suggest that the workhouse-van was one of the last of the carriages to be



The restored “Black Maria” or workhouse-van of the Saint Paul Police Department is now on display at the Department’s Western District Office in St. Paul alongside a display that features an 1897 bicycle patrol officer. Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Police Historical Society.

so replaced and may have been used up until the mid- or late 1920s.

The Saint Paul Police Department received Bernard Schorn's letter in response to a fundraising campaign spearheaded by then Officer Frederick D. Kaphingst, Department Historian, to purchase the long-lost vehicle and return it to the City of Saint Paul. Active and retired police employees, as well as the general public, were asked to donate \$10.00 each, and in return receive a Certificate of Appreciation designed by the department's forensic artist Paul D. Johnson.⁵ Along with his personal letter, Schorn submitted a check in the amount of \$10.00 toward the fundraising drive.

Schorn's modest ten-dollar contribution was truly an investment in remembrance and legacy. In fact, it was an old photo that triggered Officer Kaphingst's interest in locating and reclaiming the carriage in the first place. "I went to the home of a retired police lieutenant . . . and he showed me a picture of the paddy-wagon, stating that he had made an attempt to get it back to St. Paul on loan for one week back in 1959 for the department's 'Police-A-Rama' open-house, but the curator of the museum refused to consent." This was the second of three stops the wagon made, before returning to St. Paul.

Initially, the city sold the retired carriage to Earle Brown, a former Hennepin County Sheriff, candidate for Minnesota governor, and founder of the Minnesota State Patrol. He later sold it to a museum in Silver Springs, Florida, in 1953.⁶ The museum curator died, and in 1977 a collector from Cleveland, Ohio, purchased the wagon at auction. "I located the auction company in Pennsylvania and they eventually gave me information on the current owner." To begin with, the auction company did not want to release the identification of their client, so the owner of the auction company corresponded directly with the wagon owner on Officer Kaphingst's behalf.

"I requested that the auction company ask the latest owner if he would donate the wagon back to St. Paul, or if not, would he be willing to sell it back to the city. The auction company owner received an answer back within the week. The collector replied that he didn't want to let the



Saint Paul Police Historical Society member and retired police forensic artist Paul D. Johnson stands near the rear door to the restored workhouse-van wearing a replica of the police department's 1893 uniform. Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Police Historical Society.

wagon go, in that he had just recently acquired it. I worked on the gentleman from the auction company, and he finally gave me the owner's name, address, and telephone number. I explained that I wanted to write him a letter from the Saint Paul Police Department as a matter of record, stating what my intentions were for wanting the wagon."

Approximately six years later, in honor of the Saint Paul Winter Carnival's 100th anniversary, Officer Kaphingst sent an interoffice memo to Chief of Police William W. McCutcheon, suggesting that a parade float be built with a small replica of the paddy-wagon, and to have officers dressed in period uniforms accompany the float with a queen candidate. "He liked the idea, so I decided to call the owner after all these years to get the measurements to build a scale model. He agreed to call back with measurements in three days, but I suggested that he could save a lot of trouble by simply selling us the wagon. He refused, flat out."

As the conversation continued, the wagon owner wavered in his previous decision and asked Officer Kaphingst to call back in a week, so that he could

have time to discuss the request with his wife. Seven days later the wagon owner announced that he would sell the wagon back to the City of Saint Paul for \$10,000 including delivery

"I traveled down to Cleveland between Christmas and New Years of 1985 to authenticate the carriage. The owner brought in a team of Belgian horses and we went for a ride to see what kind of condition the unit was in, and that everything worked. I came back to St. Paul, and dressed in the old Metropolitan-style uniform of 1893, topped off with a Bobby helmet, accompanied Officer Patrick A. Devane of the department's Public Relations Unit to a City Council meeting to request financial assistance in buying back St. Paul's original horse-drawn workhouse-van. Officer Devane made the official presentation while I responded to a number of questions. To our great relief, the council members came up with the initial \$5,000 grant. Now we had to match it with an outside source, and we didn't know where that would come from."

Lieutenant Laurence F. McDonald, who worked in Police Community Services at the time, recalls trying to come up with an idea for the fundraising. "Our office, as well as Chief McCutcheon, thought that giving out Certificates of Appreciation for donations might work. We would solicit funds from our own employees and retirees, as well as from the general public. We thought that if they made a small one-time contribution to our effort, we would put their name on a commemorative plaque, which did in fact take place. We got enough contributions from internal and external sources to complete the deal."⁷

Although the Saint Paul Police Department was almost able to match the funds received from the City Council, there was still a need for an additional \$5,000. Stanley E. Hubbard, founder of Hubbard Broadcasting Corporation, based in St. Paul, made the final donation. This unexpected gift, and the \$4,850 raised from 461 individual donors, was more than enough to purchase the wagon, a trailer on which the department could transport it, and provide for some necessary restoration work.



This 1920s photograph shows the original workhouse-van with its team of horses protected against the cold by blankets parked next to the former St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse (1889–1933) at Fourth and Cedar streets. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Lieutenant McDonald said, “When I worked the Summit/University community, Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard used to run in on a lot of ‘heavy’ police calls, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. Hubbard had a big Lincoln TownCar with a radio that monitored police frequencies. Sometimes, they would arrive at calls before the police squad did. It was both work and entertainment for Stan and his wife, but I sure felt sorry for the poor reporter that came in late to the call. At the same time, the Hubbards hired off-duty police officers for security at KSTP-TV, so we had a good working relationship with Mr. Hubbard. He liked us and seemed pleased that he was in a position to return something to the city.”

With funding secured, the Saint Paul Police Department was able to acquire the paddy-wagon and return it home. Whether or not it would return home safely, was another question that presented itself as the wagon was en route to Saint Paul.⁸

Officer Kaphingst said, “The wagon, covered with a tarpaulin, was being transported on an open trailer from Cleveland. As they were proceeding around the south end of Lake Erie, they ran into an ice storm. The drivers noticed that the trailer started to weave. So they cut their speed down to a crawl, stopped at the first motel, and sat out the storm until the next

day. They contacted the Saint Paul Police Emergency Communications Center to let them know of the delay. On Tuesday, January 21, 1986, it arrived in St. Paul and was parked at the Central Team Office at Rice and Arlington. The horse-drawn wagon made a special appearance at the Saint Paul Winter Carnival Grande Day Parade that same week, on Saturday, January 25. Riding up-front with the driver, like his grandfather over a century ago, was special guest Mr. Bernard M. Shorn Jr.” And yes, the police carriage placed “first” in the parade’s horse division competition that year.

Since the wagon’s return in 1986, it has appeared in a number of local events such as community and Winter Carnival parades, as well as several events in suburban communities and in Greater Minnesota. There was even a couple named Donald H. and Gracie Knopf from Kenyon, who volunteered their horses for the wagon in exchange for the wagon’s appearance in the annual Kenyon Horse and Cutter parade. Rides in the carriage were popular as silent auction items in charity drives and civic events. Wouldn’t you like to take your family for a ride in the Winter Carnival Torchlight Parade, or ride the van to the hoosegow in an American Cancer Society “Jail & Bail” event?⁹

Eventually the wagon retired from

making parade appearances and has again been renovated. The wooden wheels were rebuilt with the assistance of an Amish wheelwright from southern Minnesota. Even though the wagon is no longer available for special rides, it is available for viewing at the Saint Paul Police Western District Office at 389 N. Hamline Avenue, just north of Interstate 94. Please note that the wagon display is open weekdays, only, from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. Now in its final resting place at the Western District Office, the spirit of tales from the drivers, riders, and their descendants live on.

Maya J. Beecham is originally from the historic Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul. She graduated from Cretin-Derham Hall High School, received a B.A. in Communication Studies from Hamline University, and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts and Liberal Studies degree at Hamline. The author thanks the Saint Paul Police Historical Society (see www.spphs.org) for their assistance with this article.

Endnotes

1. City of Saint Paul Department of Police Personnel Records. Michael J. Schorn was appointed to the position of Patrolman on June 13, 1872. He was detailed as Driver of the Work House Van on July 7, 1896, and retired on August 8, 1900.
2. Edwin Valentine Mitchell, *The Horse & Buggy Age in New England* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1937), 155.
3. Larry Millett with Jerry Mathiason, *Twin Cities Then and Now* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996), 156.
4. City of Saint Paul Department of Police, Interoffice Communication, November 18, 1985.
5. City of Saint Paul Department of Police, Certificate of Appreciation, January 21, 1986.
6. “A Tribute to Modest Earle Brown,” *Hennepin County History* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1963): 23–24.
7. Minneapolis Star & Tribune, January 9, 1986, p. 9D.
8. *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 17, 1986, p. 3C.
9. City of Saint Paul Department of Police, letter, February 28, 1986.

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German-born artist Julius Seyler (1873–1955) spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 at Glacier National Park, where he painted landscapes and portraits of Blackfoot Indians. His landscape, **Many Glacier Valley**, was completed in 1914 and was used to promote travel to the Park. Painting reproduced courtesy of the William E. Farr Collection. For more on Julius Seyler and Louis W. Hill's work in the creation and development of Glacier Park, see page 3.