

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

**Josias King —
First of the First**

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Winter, 1992-1993

Volume 27, Number 4

**Henry Bosse and the Mississippi's
Passage Into the Age of Industry**

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St. Paul, photographed in 1885 by Henry Bosse. Photo from the St. Paul District, United States Corps of Engineers. See article beginning on Page 4.

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by gifts from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.; by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon, and by grants from The Saint Paul Foundation and the F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

Special contributions have been received from the following supporters who are hereby named honorary editors of the Winter and Spring, 1993, issues of *Ramsey County History*:

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The Ramsey County Historical Society and the members of *Ramsey County History's* Editorial Board wish to express their deep appreciation to these contributors for their support.

Josias King – First Volunteer for the Union

Robert J. Stumm

Historians rarely have the time or inclination to concern themselves with life's bit players, which is why, unless your forte is Civil War trivia, the name Josias R. King might not ring any bells. Never intending to seek out notoriety, King has the distinction of being the first man to volunteer to fight for the Union Army in the Civil War.

King was a member of St. Paul's Pioneer Guards, a pre-Civil War militia company. He enlisted on April 15, 1861, during a hastily convened meeting of the Guards in St. Paul's Armory Hall. The Armory at that time was located on the third floor of the Bernheimer block, the oldest section of the Tilden Produce plant, a building that was partially demolished in the late 1960s to make room for a new Y.W.C.A. on Kellogg Boulevard near Cedar Street. Some of the Tilden plant's structural elements were incorporated into the "Y's" building. There is more, however, to King's story than his brief brush with history because he personified the spirit of the age in which he lived.

Josias King's original home was Washington, D. C., where he was born in 1832. His father was a lawyer who was active in capital politics. Little is known of Josias' boyhood, other than that he was brought up a devout Catholic. He gained his first taste of independence at the age of fourteen when he went to Florida as part of a crew that was surveying the new state after its admission to the Union in 1845. The experience instilled in King a love for the out-of-doors, but more importantly, it seems to have created within him a deep reservoir of self-confidence.

Deciding to pursue a career in the military, King enrolled in Georgetown University at the age of seventeen. He wanted to prepare himself for admission to West Point, but just as he was to begin classwork, word reached Washington that

gold had been discovered in California. Without hesitation, and evidently imbued with the gold fever that had struck so many, King discarded his earlier plans and, thanks to his family's money, sailed for California by way of Cape Horn. Thus he reached California before many of his fellow "forty-niners." Luckier than most, he did discover some gold but it was quickly eaten up by the high cost of living. To sustain himself, he held a variety of odd jobs before deciding in 1855 to head back to Washington.

King's life changed course once again in 1857 when, due to his father's connections, he was appointed an assistant to the surveyor general of Minnesota. He moved to St. Paul, then a burgeoning frontier settlement at the navigational head of the Mississippi river. Not long after his arrival, he joined the newly-formed Pioneer Guards and set in motion his march toward his rendezvous with history.

There are conflicting accounts of King's enlistment as the first man to answer the Union's call to arms, but a fortuitous set of circumstances seems to have been part of all of them. Minnesota's governor, Alexander Ramsey, was in Washington on business when Fort Sumter was fired upon April 12, 1861. Ramsey went immediately to the office of Secretary of War Simon Cameron and pledged 1,000 troops from Minnesota for the forthcoming struggle. Ramsey then wired his lieutenant governor, Ignatius Donnelly, instructing him to start recruiting without delay.

Donnelly convened a meeting of the Pioneer Guards at the St. Paul Armory. Those in attendance were told of the situation by their leader, Captain A. T. Chamblin. After a succession of patriotic pronouncements, Chamblin decided it was time to pass around the sign-up book. However, King reportedly bounded on to the stage before the book could be handed

around and signed. One version has him declaring, "Here's one for the war;" another, "I'll be the first to sign." Be that as it may, no one, least of all King, seems to have realized at the time the significance of what had transpired. It was not until the war was over that there was general recognition of King's act and what it symbolized.

The later accolades that were heaped on King were more than justified, thanks to his meritorious service throughout the war. He was elected sergeant on April 23 when the Pioneer Guards were organized as Company A of the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Fighting with the Army of the Potomac, King saw action in more than a dozen battles. At Antietam and again at Charleston, his horse was shot out from under him. Promoted steadily, he had risen to the rank of captain by the summer of 1863.

By the time his three-year term of duty was up, Josias King had again decided to make the military his career. He re-enlisted in the Union Army and was sent to the upper Missouri to fight the Dakota in the war that had erupted in Minnesota in 1862. He was appointed commander of Fort Larned in central Kansas, and he was serving there when General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate forces at Appomattox on April 9, 1865.

In May, 1866, King was commissioned a lieutenant in the United States' regular army and assigned to a base in Kentucky. There he became part of a contingent fighting the Ku Klux Klan. His stint as an officer, however, was cut short two years later when Congress decided to downsize the army. Rather than return to civilian life, King persuaded the army to make him a commissary agent. He hoped to spend the rest of his years on army posts, but in 1870 his wife became seriously ill. Knowing that her condition would improve in a cool-

er climate, King resigned from his position and moved back to St. Paul.

His resourcefulness made it fairly easy to reenter the job market. Once again he worked as a surveyor, then at a desk job at an insurance company. King had one last fling with the military when he was appointed inspector general of the Minnesota National Guard. During his brief tenure, he put into effect a number of improvements, and afterward he came to be known as the "Father of the Minnesota Guard."

Josias King gained a measure of immortality when he posed for a statue that was the central element in St. Paul's first and only major Civil War monument. The monument stands near the intersection of Kellogg Boulevard and Summit Avenue, on a hill overlooking downtown St. Paul. It was dedicated on November 21, 1903, before a crowd of 4,000 people. Three times larger than life, the statue is perched atop a fifty-foot-high granite shaft and depicts King in the full-dress uniform of a Union soldier. While the body is that of a "standard" Civil War soldier, the head of the figure is a likeness of King modeled from life by sculptor John K. Daniels.

King's last years were lived in hardship. Civil War pensions amounted to little more than a stipend, and in order to support himself and his wife, King had to continue working even though he was past eighty. The Kings became even more impoverished after a streetcar accident on March 8, 1915, which left Josias incapacitated. Friends of the King family persuaded the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* to publicize their plight in a September edition in the hope of soliciting contributions. Thanks to the generosity of some of St. Paul's wealthiest residents, including James J. Hill, the Kings were presented with a gift of \$2,500 on Christmas Day, 1915.

After being confined to his bed for nearly a year, Josias King succumbed to a heart attack on February 10, 1916. Thousands mourned his passing at a service at the St. Paul Cathedral. Archbishop John Ireland officiated at the funeral, tying King's bravery and patriotism to the war America was about to enter in Europe. Josias King would have approved, for there is little doubt that, if alive and of draft age, he would have been among the first to volunteer for service in World War I.



Josias King, top photograph. Below, King stands beside the bronze statue before it was placed on the monument. The head is his likeness, the body a "standard" Civil War soldier. Minnesota Historical Society photograph.

Robert J. Stumm is a freelance writer and author of two earlier articles on St. Paul history published in Ramsey County History.

Daughter of the Regiment from page 17

states. He was ordered to Fort Howard at Green Bay, Wisconsin, and, in 1833 to Fort Winnebago on the Fox River in Wisconsin. Here he died in 1835. The two children had left for the East—Charlotte to attend "Mrs. Upthorpe's School for Young Ladies" in New Haven, Connecticut, and her brother to enter West Point.

In 1836, when she was sixteen, Charlotte Ouisconsin Clark married another army officer, Lieutenant Horatio P. Van Cleve, during a ceremony held in deep winter. Because of the snow and severe

weather, their minister became snow blind on his way to the ceremony but "he was so perfectly familiar with the marriage service that there was no delay in consequence."

Lieutenant—later Major—Van Cleve resigned his commission in the army, a step that was taken "after much thought and deliberation. . . . But the Army had always been my home; I loved it as such. I love it still, and it is a comfort to me in my old age to know that I am not far away from a fort, that I can almost see the beautiful flag as it sways in the breeze, can almost hear the drum and fife, the music of my childhood, and can feel that they are near me, in dear old Fort Snelling, my earliest home."

In 1856 the Van Cleves moved to Long Prairie, Todd County, Minnesota Territory, where they would live for the next five years. She wrote that it was a winter of great snow and cold, there was a serious lack of food and she faced the possibility that they would all starve to death. But a sled arrived "at the last desperate moment" with supplies. "It had taken the drivers seven days to travel twenty-nine miles.

With the attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and the outbreak of the Civil War, Horatio Van Cleve was summoned to St. Paul by Governor Alexander Ramsey and asked to assume command of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The regiment distinguished itself in the battle of Mill Springs, and took part in the long siege of Corinth and the battles of Lockout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. The regiment's charge up Missionary Ridge was one of the great feats of courage of the war. Van Cleve was promoted to brigadier general early in the war and assigned the command of a brigade.

After the war, the Van Cleves settled first in St. Paul, then moved to Minneapolis. In their home at 603 Southeast Fifth Street, the Van Cleves celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on March 22, 1886. Van Cleve Park is named for the general.

Ronald M. Hubbs, retired chairman of the board of the St. Paul Companies, is a frequent contributor to Ramsey County History.



Henry Bosse's photograph of St. Paul's old High Bridge after it opened to horse-and-buggy traffic in 1889. Because the bridge offered easy access to the Cherokee Heights neighborhood, settlement of this section of the West Side began in earnest. A modern bridge replaced the old bridge in 1985. See article beginning on page 4. Photograph from the St. Paul District, United States Corps of Engineers.

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

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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Permit #3989