

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society



Ramsey County History awarded
AASLH Certificate of Commendation.

Winter, 1994

Volume 28, Number 4

A Ninety-year Run

Giesen's: Costumers to St. Paul—1872–1970

Page 4



A St. Paul Civic Opera Company production of "Martha" in 1934. Left to right are Mary Wigginton, Bill Lee and Antoinette (Tony) Bergquist. Giesen's was the official costumer for the Civic Opera. See the article about Minnesota's first commercial costume house beginning on page 4. Kenneth W. Wright photo from Walter Bergquist's collection.

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Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1994, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

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Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr., and by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon.

Thirty Down and Many More to Go

With this issue, *Ramsey County History* has completed thirty years of continuous publication. Founded in 1964 as a semi-annual magazine published by the Ramsey County Historical Society, *Ramsey County History* moved to a quarterly publication schedule in 1990. Over the years, it has served as a substantial source of information about the history, people, businesses, important events, architecture and historic sites, economics and philanthropy of Ramsey County for both local and national researchers and readers. Twice, in 1967 and 1993, *Ramsey County History* has won a certificate of commendation from the American Association for State and Local History for its outstanding quality as a historical magazine. Much of the credit for its sustained excellence is due to the work of its founder and only editor since 1964, Virginia Brainard Kunz.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

What's Historic About this Site?

The House Peder Foss Built— New Brighton, 1896

This is the fourteenth in a series of articles on Ramsey County's historic sites.

When the Foss House, the home of its longtime resident, Peder Foss, was built in 1896, New Brighton was a village of about 350 linked by rail to both St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The land on which the house stands, although now within New Brighton's city limits, was originally farmland, owned in 1874 and for the next twenty years by the Bowers family. In 1895 Josephine Bowers sold the land to Ingebor Foss (later Ingebor Oleson), who may have been Peder Foss's sister. The house was built approximately a year later and by 1898, an atlas of Ramsey County had labeled the property as belonging to Peder Foss.

Foss was born in 1858, the son of Ole Foss, a Norwegian immigrant to Ramsey County. The Foss family owned the house until 1944, when it was sold to Esther Swanson.

The house is historically and architecturally significant as the largest and most intact Victorian house now standing within New Brighton and as the home for many years of a family who were early settlers in the area. Important architectural details include the three-story round corner turret with conical cap and finial and the three bullseye windows on the turret's third story. There is an open porch with a pediment at the entrance, supported by square columns, and an open side porch. Decorative shingles cover the gable ends.

New Brighton, in the 1890s, had grown from a community of farmers who raised crops and cattle into a busy commercial center as the home of the Minneapolis Stockyards and Packing Company. In 1887 a group of Minneapolis



businessmen established the packing plant to compete with the recently founded stockyards at South St. Paul. However, the competition of the South St. Paul stockyards, as well as increasing complaints by townspeople about air and water pollution caused the New Brighton stockyards to retrench around 1900 and eventually to close.

World War II brought a surge of growth and business activity to the community. In 1941 a large munitions plant was built immediately north of New

Brighton in rural Moundsview Township. This attracted many new residents to the area. Gas and sewer connections were installed, bus service was established and roads were improved.

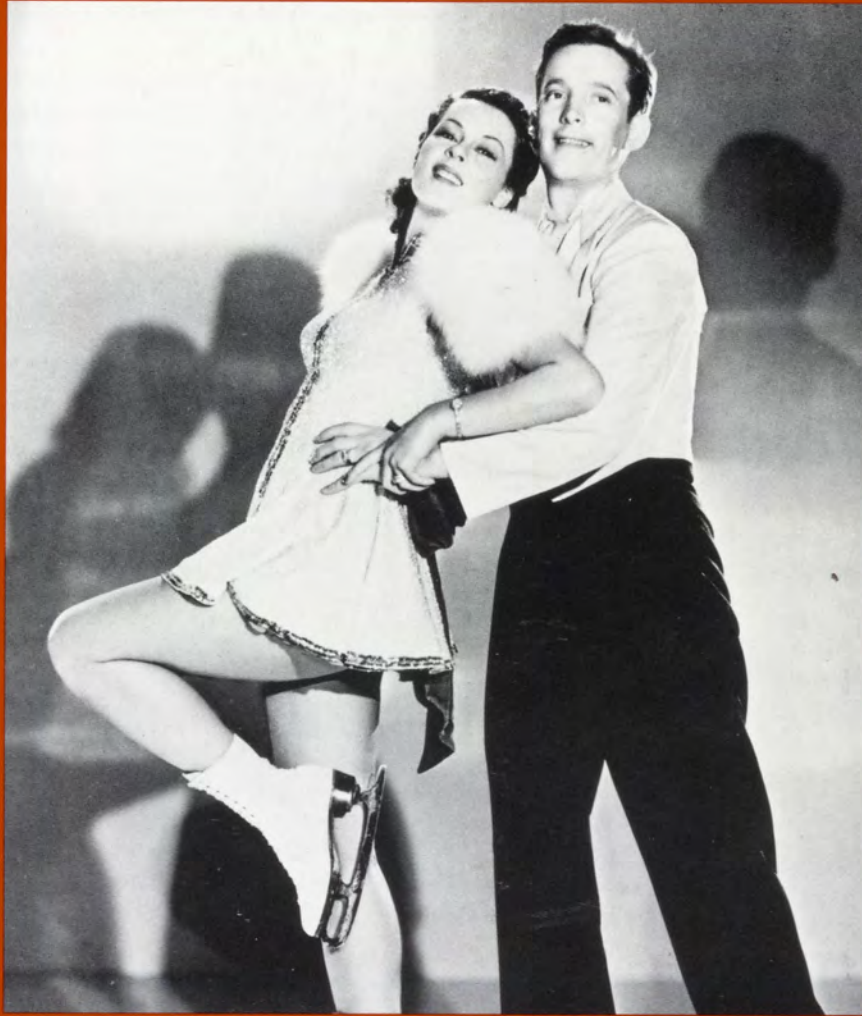
But it was during the two decades after World War II—from 1950 to 1970—that New Brighton experienced the growth that boosted its population from 2,200 to more than 19,000. Today, the city remains largely a suburban community linked to the greater Twin Cities area by two Interstates—35E and 694.

Giesen's from page 15

ty could tarnish the legacy left by Marie, Martin, and Olga Giesen, Jacobson, Georgiana Glaser, Minnie Robinson, and those who tried to carry on the business in the Giesen tradition. It was, for hundreds of thousands of people for nearly 100 years, "a house of real make-believe," in which ordinary men and women were transformed into Santa Claus, a Polar bear, an Oriental King, Madame Butterfly, Norma, Earnest or Aida. And millions more, who may not even have known the name Giesen's, were charmed, enlightened and entertained by the parades and plays, operas and oratorios, pageants and parties that

Giesen's Costumers had illuminated with their beautiful and impeccable costumes.

Before becoming a technical writer nearly fifteen years ago, Virginia L. Martin worked for the Minnesota Historical Society for eight years. In the years since, she has continued writing and editing historical articles and books. She wrote a history of Abdallah's Candy Company and edited books on Andrew Peterson, a Scandia pioneer and horticulturist and on NORCOSTCO (Northwestern Costume Co.) of Minneapolis. Two of her family-based histories have been published in Hennepin County History. Her article about the fifty-year-old culturally diverse Rainbow Club is to be published in Mpls/St Paul in 1964.



Ice Follies pair skaters Bess Ehrhardt and Roy Shipstad in 1938. They played later in the MGM movie, "Ice Follies of 1939." When Shipstads and Johnson were just starting out, Martin and Olga Giesen loaned them their costumes. See article beginning on page 4. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

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