

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.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Fallon
Chairman of the Board

Joanne Englund
President

John M. Lindley
First Vice President

James Russell
Treasurer

Sidney P. Abramson, Arthur H. Baumeister, Jr., Thomas Boyd, Marshall Hatfield, John Harens, Liz Johnson, Judge Margaret M. Murrinan, Dr. Thomas B. Mega, Laurie Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Thomond O'Brien, Eileen Roberts, Darrell Rooney, Evangeline Schroeder, Jane Thiele, Richard A. Wilhoit and Laurie Zenner.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H. Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz, Thomas J. Kelley, Arthur McWatt, Laurie M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Coleman Bloomfield, Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr., Ronald Hachey, Reuel D. Harmon, Robert S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T. Lanners, Jr., Don Larson, George Latimer, Lewis Lehr, David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel H. Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome Plunkett, Peter S. Popovich, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Diane Ahrens
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Ruby Hunt
Commissioner Warren Schaber
Commissioner Brenda Thomas
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, manager, Ramsey County.

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.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 28, Number 4

Winter, 1994

CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** Giesen's: Costumers to St. Paul—1872–1970
Virginia L. Martin
- 16** Growing Up in St. Paul
A Grandchild's Journey into a Swedish Past
John W. Larson
- 22** What's Historic About This Site?
The House Peder Foss Built In New Brighton—1896
- 23** Books, Etc.
Too Hot, Went to Lake, by Peg Meier
Reviewed by Liz Holum Johnson
James J. Hill House, by Craig Johnson
Reviewed by Thomas C. Buckley
The Treasure Hunt by Roger Barr
Reviewed by Richard T. Murphy, Sr.

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

Letters to the Editor

Courthouse Revisited

I enjoyed seeing my account of my growing-up years in St. Paul in the Fall issue of *Ramsey County History*, but I also very much enjoyed reading the articles on the courthouse because I toured the building when it first opened back in the early 1930s. The details about the light fixtures and the wood paneling brought back many memories of the building when I first saw it sixty years ago. When my brother, John Cotter, began working for the city back in the late 1920s, he was in the old courthouse and I visited him there several times. I would have liked to have visited him more often but we weren't supposed to visit people at work. Years later, when he was superintendent of sanitation for the city of St. Paul, I remember visiting him more frequently in the new courthouse. I remember, particularly, admiring the sculptures on the elevator doors. Thank you for bringing this alive again for all of us who remember those early years.

—Dorothy Chaput, St. Paul.

A Superb Issue

Hats off to Tom Kelley for his wonderful articles on the Ramsey County Courthouse and City Hall. The entire issue of *Ramsey County History* was superb, and I appreciated in particular the explanation of art deco. I needed that!

—Robert E. Hess, St. Paul.

Nina Clifford's Chandelier

The articles on the courthouse reminded me. Is it true that the chandelier hanging in the mayor's office came from Nina Clifford's famous bawdy house?

—Nelson Smith, Maplewood.



The D. W. McCourt house on East Jessamine. Ramsey County Historical Society photo.

Perhaps. St. Paul seems awash with stories about the legendary madam, many of them verging on the apocryphal. The Ramsey County Historical Society has a plaque embedded with a doorbell that also was supposed to have come from Clifford's house on Hill Street. We'd like to hear from anyone who knows about the chandelier.

We Stand Corrected

I enjoyed the article by Thomas J. Kelley about the renovation of the city hall-county courthouse in the Fall, 1993, issue of your magazine. However, it contains some erroneous information. Toward the end of the article, on page 31, he says that it is now possible to do many things without ever leaving the first floor. Two of these items mentioned are paying taxes and obtaining land records. Both of these are now done on the eighth floor of the old West Publishing building across the street. Also, Kelley stated on page 15 that the register of deeds and abstract clerks offices have "disappeared." While it is true that they are no longer elected

offices, they both are alive and well and functioning daily, also on the eighth floor of the West Publishing building, to which these offices moved in June of 1992.

—William R. Allard, St. Paul.

Reader Allard is correct. A funny thing sometimes happens as plans move from the planning stage into implementation. The word "disappeared," in connection with the register of deeds and abstract clerks offices, perhaps was not well chosen. I did intend to convey exactly what our reader has pointed out, that they have disappeared only as elected offices.

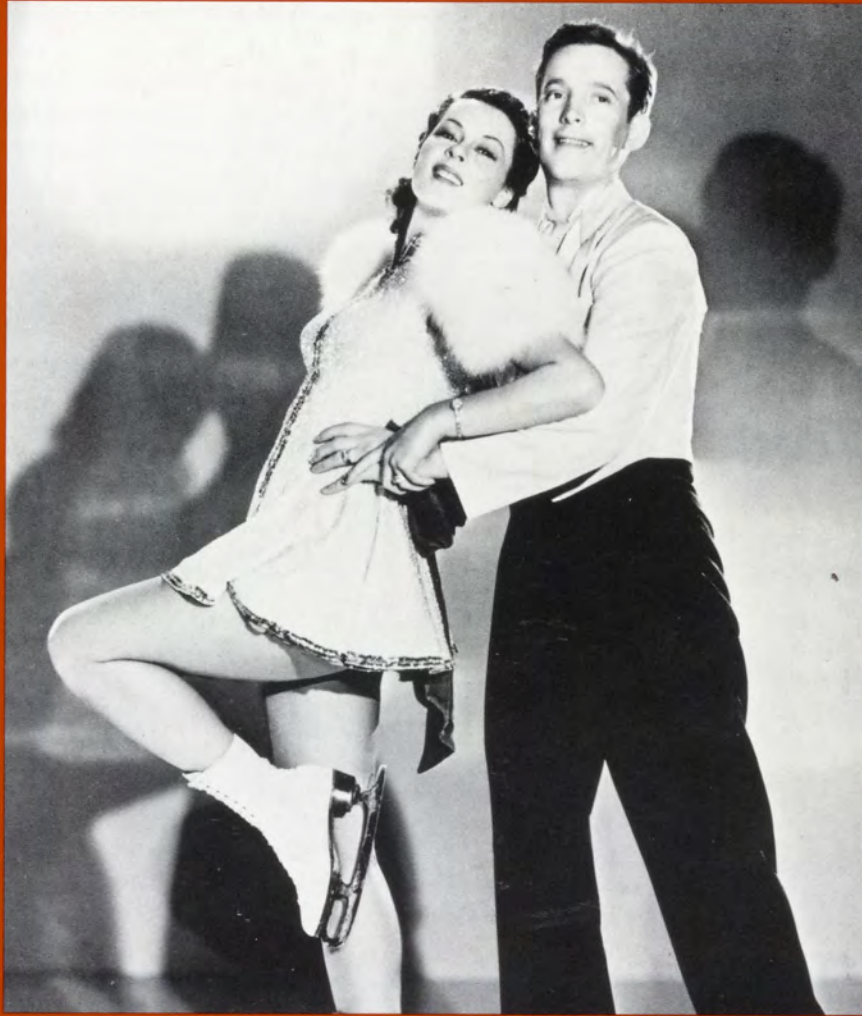
—Thomas J. Kelley, St. Paul.

Whose House was That?

I was visiting friends in the North End neighborhood some time ago and I came upon a huge and very interesting house on East Jessamine. It stood on a hill and commanded a fine view of the surrounding landscape, a view now bisected by the 35E freeway. Can you tell me anything about this house, and is it still standing?

—Susan V. Johnson,
Inver Grove Heights.

If you're asking about the house at 525 East Jessamine, it is indeed still standing. It is listed on the Historic Sites Survey of St. Paul and Ramsey County conducted in 1980-1981 by the Ramsey County Historical Society and the St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission. The survey form indicates that the house was built in 1888 for \$7,000. Its original owner was a St. Paul dentist named D. W. McCourt. A year later he sold the house to Clara H. Holdridge; she in turn sold it to Charles K. Sharod in 1890; and he sold it to Gustav A. Eisenraeder in 1903.



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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul MN
Permit #3989