

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

Euphoria Dimmed:  
X-Rays' First Victim

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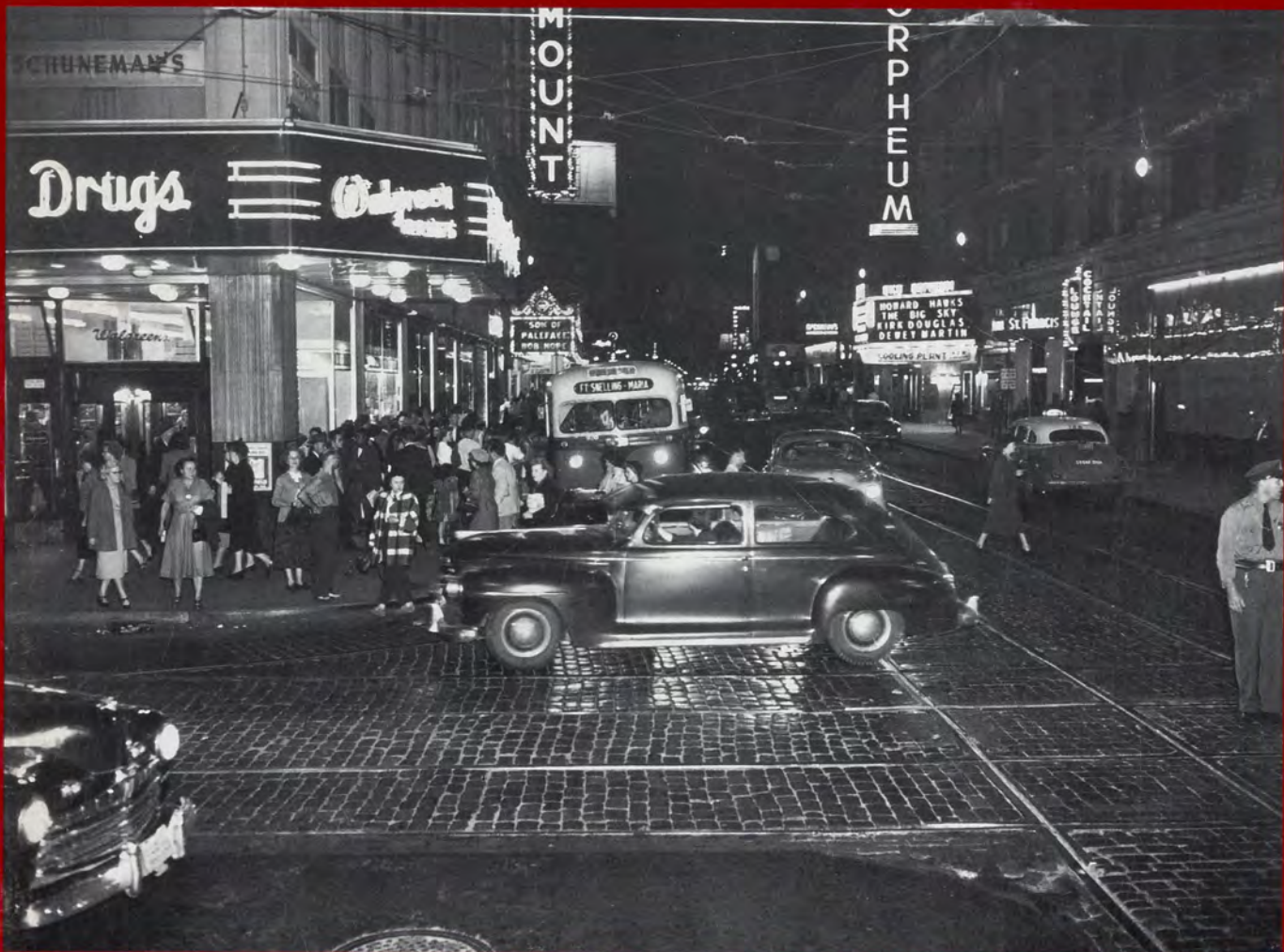
Winter, 1997

Volume 31, Number 4

*Rats, Politicians, Librarians*

Untold Stories of the Old St. Francis Hotel

Page 4



A brightly lighted downtown St. Paul was photographed on the night of September 4, 1952. This view looks west along Seventh Street from Wabasha to St. Peter. The St. Frances is on the right. Minnesota Historical Society photo.



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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 31, Number 4

Winter, 1997

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

**T**oward the end of 1996, Ronald M. Hubbs, a long-time supporter of history in Ramsey County, died. Ron not only had contributed a number of fine articles that were published over the years in *Ramsey County History*, but he also was unfailingly enthusiastic in his support for the Ramsey County Historical Society's publication program. The Society dedicates this issue to his memory and to the great value he placed on history. In it we feature a building—the St. Francis Hotel—and a location—Seventh Place—that many residents and visitors know but little understand in terms of their historical significance to St. Paul. A companion piece tells the story of the Saint Paul Building.

*John M. Lindley, chair, Editorial Board*



magical beauty . . . an unexpected gift, the memory of which rests peacefully in my heart. I miss the old convent and even today experience a pang of surprise and disappointment every time I round the corner at Linwood and Grotto and look north. Invaded by an asphalt driveway leading to squatty, modern buildings, the old brick wall which once enclosed a holy secret is breached.

Many who have married and moved away from Crocus Hill eventually return. St. Paul is that kind of town. Despite new infrastructure, a freeway, and general

emersion in the troubles of the modern world, there is a trace of Victoriana about the Crocus Hill neighborhood, which lends an air of dependability, rather than decay. I understand at my age now why people get interested in historic preservation. In *Our Town*, Emily bids "goodbye" to Grover's Corners, and to life as she has known it, knowing she did not really know it, that although she was a good person, she possessed the flaw we all possess: the almost inescapable flaw of careless unconsciousness. She cries out, "Oh, Earth! You are too wonderful for anyone

to realize you!" We, too, yearn to realize and to remember and to know where we belong.

*BRENDA RAUDENBUSH moved to Atlanta in 1964 where she and her husband raised four children. She now lives near Conyers, Rockdale County, Georgia, where she teaches remedial reading to adults through the county literacy program and is a member of the Rockdale Writers' Group and the Honey Creek Poets' Society.*

## 'Empty Nests' and Tea at the Ramsey House

*Editor's Note: Brenda Raudenbush's mother, Patsy Raudenbush, has added her own reminiscences of an earlier generation.*

### Patsy Raudenbush

It really started as a joke. We were anticipating losing our first-born sons as they went off the college in the East. Silly it was. We were grown women, but we also were friends and neighbors, so we got together every so often, supposedly to grieve—today's "empty nest" syndrome. We told our sons, jubilant to depart into an adult world, that we would share their letters with one another. Of course we wouldn't, particularly after we found out how short those letters would be.

We all were wives of professional men and all of us were serious volunteers in museums, hospitals, and industrial places. Occasionally we organized outings to someone's cabin on a lake or in a forest. We hiked, played bridge, read, or knitted. We tried to create gourmet meals, and we learned that it was true, that life did go on.

\*\*\*\*

Like most young mothers, I used to take the children for afternoon walks. There weren't many uniformed nursemaids in our neighborhood. One glorious September day, I assembled my three daughters and off we went to stroll the streets and stop at the house of Arthur Foote, our minister at Unity Church. He

was in Maine for the summer but was expected back because school was about to begin. I had with me a pair of pants his daughter, Franny, had left at our house after a sleepover with Brenda, who was then nine.

Pants in hand, washed and wrapped in tissue paper, I rang the doorbell. No response. We went to the back of the house and leaned on that bell. No answer, but someone must have been living there because a man's shorts hung on the clothesline. Foote no doubt had invited a new parishioner to use the house. I took out Franny's pants and was just hanging them on the clothesline when the back door was flung open by a small, gray-haired man who shouted "*Was Machen sie mit meine pants?*"

I was stunned, but I tried to explain with "*machen*" and "*pants*" what I was doing so logically. No fractured German calmed the old fellow so I waved and scuttled my family away.

\*\*\*\*

Some years earlier, as a bride, I took tea, as we said, at the Alexander Ramsey house. I was returning a call made on me by the Ramsey granddaughters, Anita and Laura Furness, during the first year of my marriage. They and my family had Philadelphia connections. I wore a hat and white gloves and I carried a folding pink leather, gold-tooled case which held my calling cards.

Passing through the iron gate, I stepped up to the porch and pulled the

bell at the enormous door. The Furness sisters greeted me warmly. They were expecting me. Ahead of me was a very long staircase; at the left was the long parlor with two marble fireplaces and two crystal chandeliers.

We moved into the library where three upholstered chairs had been placed before a cheerful fire in the fireplace. As the older sister, Anita presided over tea. A maid in black with a crisp white cap and apron entered carrying a large silver tray. There was a silver urn for hot water on its stand above an alcohol flame. Tea was steeping in a china pot. Sugar and cream and thin lemon slices with clover stars, were there, too. There were cucumber sandwiches, little cakes, and dreamy cookies, all of them made from recipes of Anna Ramsey, the governor's wife.

"Patsy, this is Lapsang Souchong smoky tea," Anita Ramsey said. "How would you like it?" I knew the tea, but thought I would ask for sugar and milk, the English way. I thought the Furness sisters quite English. The tea was excellent, the conversation (books and art) stimulating, but the autumn dark was approaching and it was time to take my leave.

Near the door, Anita, who always was forthright, I later learned, said to me: "You know, one never should take milk with a smoky tea." Slightly abashed, I thanked her and Laura. Then I thought, she's trying to help me learn a subtlety of social manners.





*St. Paul's first public Market House at Seventh and Wabasha, about 1870. It was built by Vetal Guerin, a French-Canadian who was the first settler on this tract of land. Minnesota Historical Society photo. See article beginning on page 4.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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