

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

The Legend of Boxer,
Bootlegger
Sam Taran

Page 13

Winter, 1998

Volume 32, Number 4

A 'Journalistic Launching'
A Chronicle of the St. Paul Daily News

Page 4



A cartoon in the St. Paul Daily News celebrating the tenth anniversary of the beginning of publication on March 1, 1900. Photo from the newspaper collection at the Minnesota Historical Society. See the history of the Daily News beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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A Message from the Executive Director

In this issue the Ramsey County Historical Society is honoring Elsie Wildung as a true friend of local history. Born in St. Paul a century ago—on April 30, 1898—and raised there, she and her family are examples of the extraordinary ordinary people who have built our community, the people local history celebrates. Although she remembered the Society in her will with the largest bequest in its history, she was a modest person who lived an unpretentious life and cherished her community. Her fortune came from the community and she has returned most of it to the community. Her legacy will perpetuate the sense of continuity she inherited from those who went before her.

Preserving our history is a way of preserving our common identity, of guiding us as we chart our future. In 1999, the society will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary and the thirty-fifth year of the continuous publication of *Ramsey County History*. And Ramsey County and the Gibbs farm together will celebrate the 150th anniversary of their establishment in 1849, the year Minnesota became a territory. Much of our heritage is kept alive in this magazine, in our archives, and at the Gibbs Farm Museum. We truly are the Society of people like Elsie Wildung; we have much worth preserving.

The Society has just completed a new strategic plan committing us once again to maintaining a tradition of excellence in all we do. There is no better way to secure the heritage we all share than by a bequest or gift to the endowment the Society has established. We are ready to assist any of you who wish to remember the Society in your will, or during your lifetime. Even modest amounts will grow to make a major impact on the future far beyond a modest beginning.

History is a powerful legacy to leave to future generations. Please consider this wonderful opportunity to make a lasting gift to our community by remembering the Ramsey County Historical Society in your will.

Priscilla Farnham

Elsie Wildung Remembers The Society in Her Will



Elsie Wildung
1898-1996

Elsie Wildung was a lifelong resident of St. Paul and her roots stretch deep into the city's history. She was born just a century ago, on April 30, 1898, the youngest of nine children, and she grew up on Dayton's Bluff. All her life she maintained a strong sense of family.

Her parents, Friedrich William Wille and Emma Sophia Volkert Wille, were of German and Alsace Lorraine ancestry, and it was a religious family. Her grandfather, Johann Nicolas Volkert, who was born on February 19, 1822, in Nuremberg, Germany, decided at the age of fifteen that he would like to become a missionary. Accepted by his local Mission Society, he sailed for the United States in 1847 to study for the ministry in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After ordination in the Lutheran church two years later, he served a number of congregations before becoming minister of Emmanuel Congregation, now known as Trinity Lone Oak Lutheran Church of Eagan, Dakota County, Minnesota.

Elsie Wildung's father was a farmer who also worked as a carpenter to help support his family. Her mother was a homemaker. The family attended St. John's Lutheran Church in St. Paul where the Wille children also attended the church school. After she graduated from Johnson High School, and with her brothers no longer at home, Elsie Wille remained there to help her mother with the housekeeping. She was active in

such church activities as the Ladies Aid, and she also attended meetings at the St. Paul YWCA. There the "Y" camps, the organized vacations, and the plays the women put on all were sources of lifelong friendships. Her parents' deaths came after sixty years of marriage when both were in their eighties.

On January 31, 1941, Elsie Wille married Lea Wildung, a postal worker. She was forty-two years old. In the aftermath of World War II, the Wildungs sent greatly-appreciated CARE packages to Lea Wildung's relatives in Germany. They invested in 3M stock, then priced at 25 cents a share, and they traveled widely—to Germany to visit relatives, to elsewhere in Europe, to Alaska, to Canada, and, with the Housewife's League, throughout much of the United States.

In 1966, Elsie and Lea Wildung celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary with a large party at the church. A year later, in January, 1967, Lea Wildung died suddenly from a heart attack. Elsie Wildung remained in their home on East Nebraska, near Lake Phalen, but she continued to travel widely, often taking friends with her.

She enjoyed music. After transferring her membership to Gustavus Adolphus Church, nearer her home, she joined several other women as a bell ringer, providing music for services. She played the organ at family gatherings, and taught several nieces to play the piano. Her niece, Dorothy Wille of St. Paul, remembers how she and her husband would host large family dinner on Thanksgiving and how she graciously she presided over her family's many other holiday events.

In 1987, her health declining, Elsie Wildung moved from her home to the Lake Ridge Nursing Home. She died there on May 28, 1996, at the age of ninety-eight. She is survived by a step-daughter, Marion Wildung, five nieces and three nephews. In her will, she left a bequest of more than \$200,000 to the Ramsey County Historical Society. Her gift will be part of an Endowment Fund the Society is creating to support publication of *Ramsey County History*.

V.B.K.

Letters to the Editor

A Thankful Thanksgiving

Years ago, when I was a teen-ager, my mother was ill in late November so we decided to forgo the usual home-cooked Thanksgiving dinner and eat out. This was a revolutionary idea in those years before World War II when no one we knew would have dreamed of not having a traditional home-cooked dinner. Nevertheless, we had a wonderful Thanksgiving meal at a restaurant somewhere on Grand Avenue in St. Paul, but I can't remember where.

Alice Louise Porter, St. Paul.

That might have been Farber's Colonial Tea and Coffee Shop. Mrs. Lillian Farber opened her shop on Grand Avenue, between Milton and Victoria Streets, in 1939. She served a full Thanksgiving dinner for 65 cents; 50 cents without soup, salad or dessert. Writing in the Grand Gazette in 1977, historian James Taylor Dunn added that another attraction was fortune-teller Lillian Mountford, reader of palms and tea leaves and possibly Mrs. Faber herself in disguise.

Weathering Winter

Do the historical records show that winters of the past really were more severe than those we survive now? Or as warm as this winter?

A. E. Jones, Minneapolis.

Some were and some weren't, of course. A St. Paul Winter Carnival once was cancelled because the weather was too warm to sustain an ice castle, skating rinks, and toboggan slides. On the other hand, the winter of 1873 opened with "a storm unequalled in severity and destructiveness by any which had ever occurred in the memory of man," as historian J. Fletcher Williams put it. The

polar wave swept into the state January 7, bringing with it thirty-six hours of icy gale and fine snow. Seventy people died, many were maimed and some 300 cattle and horses perished.

Gladstone and Maplewood

My grandparents used to talk about living near Gladstone, but I've never been quite sure where that was. Is it in the St. Paul area?

Norton Swanson, Mendota Heights.

Gladstone (or Gloster) was a tiny community in what is now Maplewood. In 1887 a developer, the Gladstone Land Company platted land east of St. Paul and north and south of Frost Avenue and built fifty woodframe houses for workers in the nearby St. Paul Plow Works factory and the shops of the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad. In 1910 Gladstone had a population of 250, a saloon, two depots, a church, and several businesses. The railroad shops closed in 1915 and by the 1930s Gladstone was just a collection of houses. The community was absorbed by Maplewood when it incorporated in 1957.

Dayton's Bluff Revisited

I'm thinking about buying a house in Dayton's Bluff, and I'm curious about its history. What can you tell me about the background of the area?

Naomi Peterson, St. Paul.

The history of Dayton's Bluff actually predates that of St. Paul. Scholars believe that the burial mounds in Indian Mounds Park were constructed by bands of Hopewellian Indians centuries ago. In modern times Kaposia, a large Dakota Indian village, existed there and

the Dakota also used the area as a burial ground. William Evans, a discharged soldier from Fort Snelling, staked the first claim on the bluff in the 1830s. He was followed by other pioneers who opened farms in the area. Dayton's Bluff, however, was named for real estate speculator Lyman Dayton who bought 5,000 acres there in 1849 as an investment. Wealthy residents built mansions near the edge of the bluff during the 1850s and 1860s, but most of those have been torn down.

The Lake in Langford Park

My grandmother had some old snapshots of St. Anthony Park. In one of them it looks as though Langford Park was once a lake. Was it?

Karen Olson, Roseville.

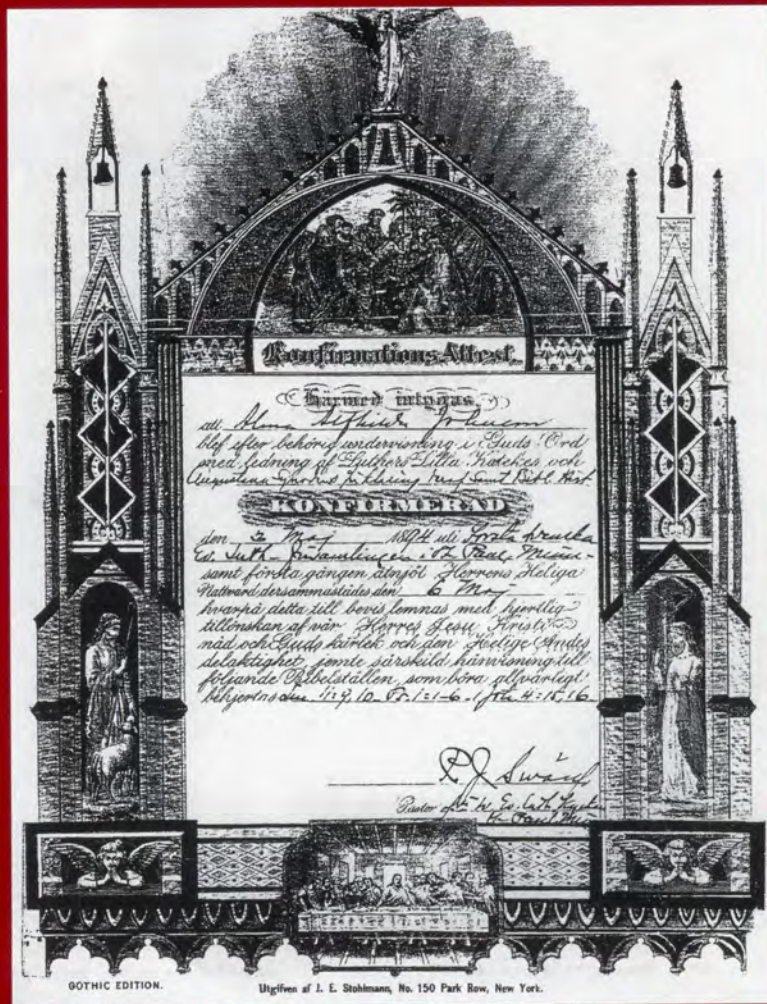
Yes. The St. Anthony Park Company drained the lake, then built a dozen or so houses in the mid-1880s and early 1890s. They sold quickly to families attracted to the neighborhood by its location midway between St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Hazards of Traffic

The recent raising of highway speed limits brought back memories of a time when speeds of 35-miles-an-hour were considered dangerous. There was some sort of a citizens' committee that was organized to report speeders. Talk about "big brother!"

Edward Ellison, Mahtomedi.

In 1933, the St. Paul City Council considered imposing a 35-mile-an-hour speed limit on arterial streets and the Kiwanis Club organized 3,000 residents into a Citizens Vigilance Committee to report traffic violators.



Alma Johnson's certificate of confirmation from the First Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in St. Paul, May 3, 1894. See "Growing Up in St. Paul," page 17.

R.C.H.S.
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