

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

A Memoir:
Jimmy Griffin Remembers
His Years on the Force

Page 13

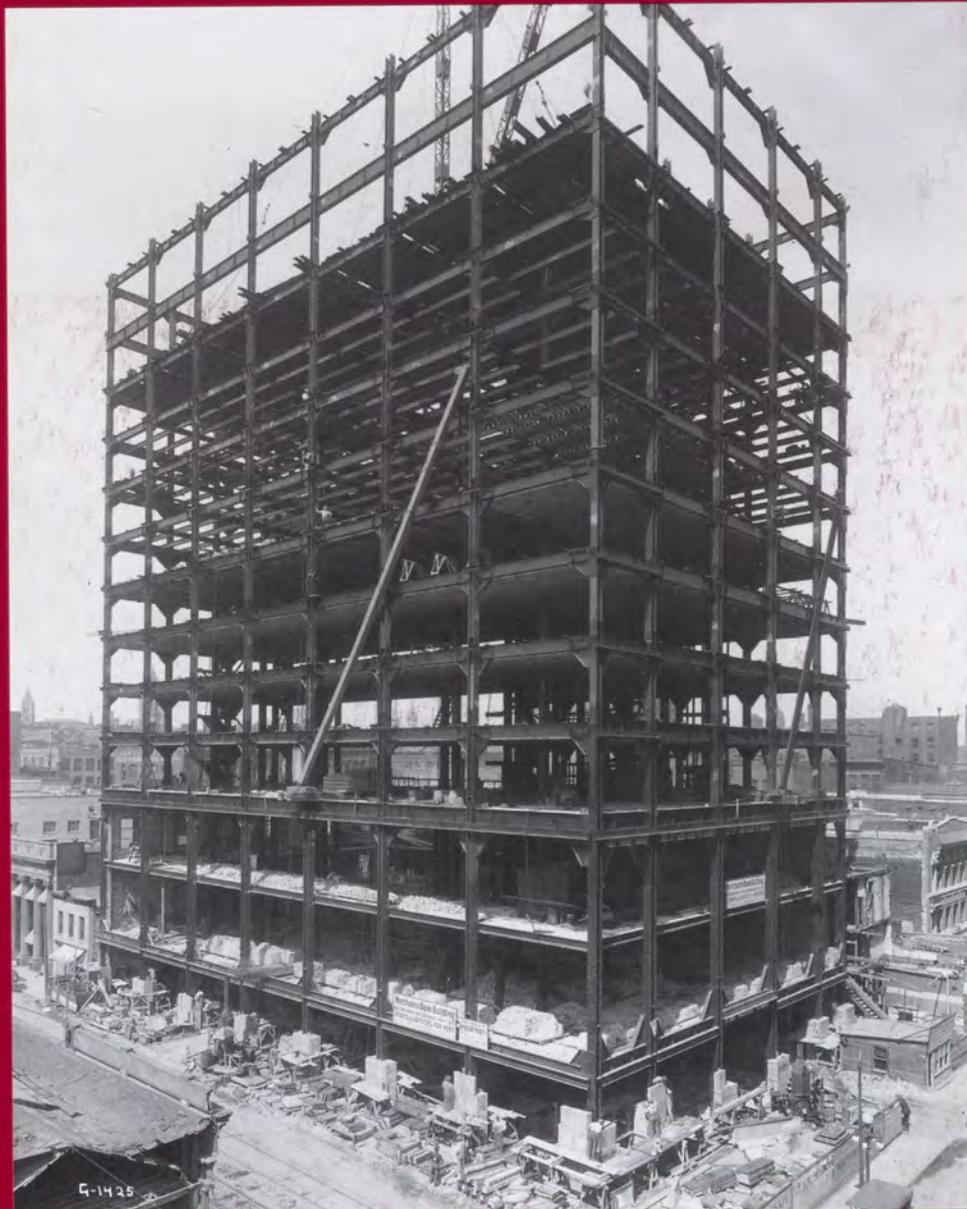
Winter, 2002

Volume 36, Number 4

Crises and Panics and Mergers and Failures

St. Paul's Banks and How They Survived 75 Years

—Page 4



The Merchants Bank building under construction at 333 North Robert Street in 1914. Photo from the Minnesota Historical Society. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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CONTENTS

- 3 Letters
- 4 Crises and Panics and Mergers and Failures
St. Paul's Banks and How They Survived
Their First 75 Years
G. Richard Slade
- 13 A Memoir
Jimmy Griffin, St. Paul's First Black Deputy
Police Chief, Remembers His Years on the Force
Jimmy Griffin with Kwame JC McDonald
- 19 Tubal Cain in New Brighton
The Harris Forge and Rolling Mill Company
Leo J. Harris
- 24 Who Was the Charles E. Flandrau Who Built That House?
- 25 Books

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In this issue Richard Slade, a former St. Paul bank executive who's also an historian of Twin Cities banking, examines the first seventy-five years of St. Paul's banks. Slade's primary focus is on the events and maneuvers during the 1920s that led to the formation in early 1929 of the "Minnesota Twins"—Northwest Bancorporation in Minneapolis and the First Bank Stock Group in St. Paul. During the decade of the 1920s, Minnesota banking experienced significant problems that led to numerous bank failures before the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in the fall of 1929. As Slade explains, Minnesota's banking problems of the 1920s produced a "combination of enlightened self-interest and fear" that gave rise to the idea of creating a bank holding company as an institutional bulwark against the growing economical and financial uncertainties of the times.

The Ramsey County Historical Society is also pleased to reprint in this issue an excerpt from *Jimmy Griffin: A Son of Rondo, A Memoir*. In the selection reproduced here, Griffin recounts some of his experiences as an African American rejoining the St. Paul police force in 1946, following his wartime service in the U.S. Navy. This firsthand account tells without editorializing of the racism of that era, Griffin's effectiveness as an officer and his unflinching determination to make his way on the force on the merits of his performance on the job.

This issue concludes with another piece of family history from Leo Harris, a local lawyer and historian. In a carefully researched account of his family's iron business, the Harris Forge and Rolling Mill Company, in New Brighton in the 1880s and '90s, Harris gives us a glimpse of the efforts of a small manufacturing firm to prosper in a rural community on the fringe of St. Paul. Despite careful management and a ready market for its iron bar, fire twice destroyed the firm's plant and in 1893 doomed the business, bringing hard times to the Harris family and the community of New Brighton.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Letters to the Editor

Sinclair Lewis Wasn't Wrong—We Were

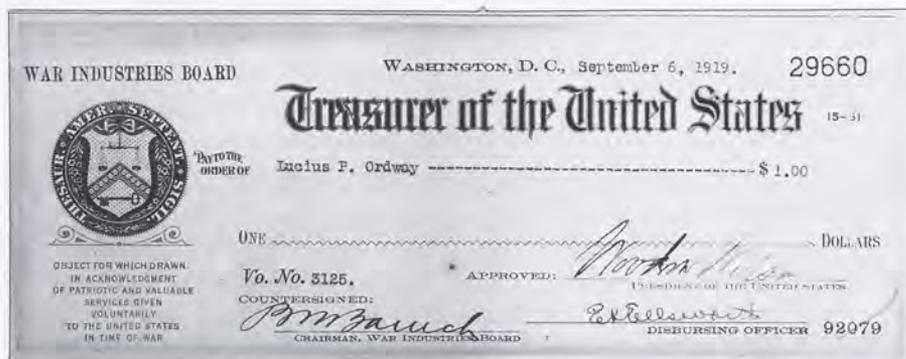
Re: William Fallon's letter concerning Grace Flandrau's residence in 1942, published in the Fall, 2001, issue of *Ramsey County History*. Sinclair Lewis's diary was not mistaken in noting his visit to Grace Flandrau in 1942 occurred at the old Flandrau home at 385 Pleasant Avenue in St. Paul, not at 548 Portland Avenue. Grace and her husband, Blair Flandrau, lived at 548 Portland from late 1919 until late 1938.

Charles Macomb Flandrau, Blair's older brother, died in the spring of 1938, leaving the old Flandrau home on Pleasant uninhabited. As his dying wish, Blair begged Grace to move him to his parents' home on Pleasant. She sold their home on Portland in the summer of 1938 and moved with Blair to 385 Pleasant Avenue that fall. Blair died in December 1938. Charles had left the house to his brother in his will, and at Blair's death Grace inherited it from him.

Grace Flandrau occupied 385 Pleasant Avenue with servants from 1938 until 1955 when, according to the terms of Charles's will, she had the old home-stead torn down and moved permanently to Farmington, Ct., where she had maintained a secluded haven for writing for many years. (Charles Flandrau's will directed that 385 Pleasant Avenue be razed when family members no longer wished to reside there.) Grace Flandrau died in Connecticut in December 1971 and is buried in Oakland Cemetery in the Flandrau family plot.

Georgia Ray (Lindeke), St. Paul.

We are indebted to Georgia Ray (Lindeke), Grace Flandrau's biographer, for setting the record straight. For more about Grace Flandrau from Georgia Ray (Lindeke), see "Saving Grace," *Mpls/St. Paul magazine*, February, 1998, and "In Search of the Real Grace



Lucius P. Ordway's dollar-a-year check for his World War I service on the Priorities Committee of the Wilson administration's War Industries Board was incorrectly credited on page 29 of the Fall issue of *Ramsey County History*. It was reproduced with permission from Ford Nicholson, from whose collection the check came.

Flandrau," *Minnesota History*, summer, 1999. For something about Charles E. Flandrau who built the old Flandrau house, see page 24 in this issue of *Ramsey County History*.

Was That Really Ordway?

Was that really Lucius P. Ordway in that photograph of Crane Company Branch House managers in the last issue of *Ramsey County History*? Compared with other photos of Ordway in that issue, it doesn't look like him.

Mary Louise Axdal, St. Paul

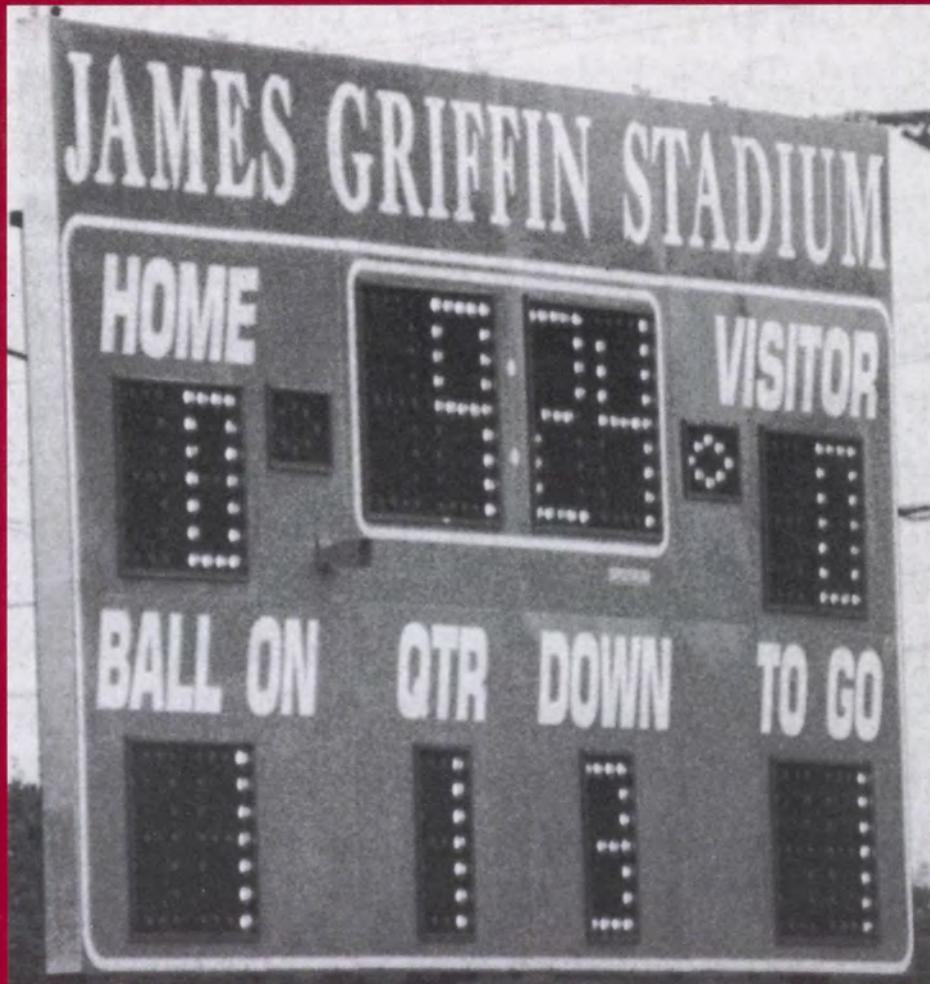
You're not the first to ask. The photo was from an album in the Crane family collection at the Chicago Historical Society and came to us without identifications. We also compared it with the 1902 portrait of Ordway and, by the process of elimination, thought we had the right man. After we went to press, we received a copy of the July, 1905, issue of *Valve World*, the Crane Company's magazine, which carried extensive coverage of the anniversary celebration and a different photo of the Branch House managers. This photo had identifications but, unfortunately, the hats the men wore obscured their faces, making comparison identifications difficult and inconclusive. The

question thus remains unresolved. However, *Valve World* also reported that Ordway presented "Mr. Crane with a very handsome gold loving cup," so we at least know that Ordway was at the party.

Congratulations

Thanks so much for sending me your wonderful article on Lucius Pond Ordway. It's always gratifying to see the scholarly results of the labors of people I have helped. The article is a perfect example of factual historical writing made readable and compelling, something that I know personally is very difficult to achieve. I found your descriptions of Rhode Island to be colorful and most accurate. One point needs clarification (before you hear from all the textile mill historians in Rhode Island!). You stated that the Pawtuxet River flows through Providence and that mills were clustered there. Actually, the river flows through Warwick, Rhode Island, in Kent County. Early mills were clustered there and also throughout the Blackstone River Valley. I'll give a copy of *Ramsey County History* to the Rhode Island Historical Society. It will add much to their information on Ordway and the Arkwright Mills.

Christine Lamar, historian and genealogist, Providence, Rhode Island



Griffin Stadium Scoreboard and Signage. See excerpts from Jimmy Griffin's memoir beginning on page 13.

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

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