

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

A Novelist Remembers:  
*Memoirs of Grace Flandrau*

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Winter, 2004

Volume 38, Number 4

*'He Loved a Tall Tale'*

The Life and Times of I. A. O'Shaughnessy—  
The Man Who Happily Gave His Money Away

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Portrait of I. A. O'Shaughnessy painted by artist Frank Bensing. From the University of St. Thomas Special Collections.

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 38, Number 4

Winter, 2004

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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## Message from the President of Ramsey County Historical Society

Anyone who has spent some time in St. Paul has probably come across the name O'Shaughnessy. It may have been on the facade of a building at the University of St. Thomas, or on the campus of the College of St. Catherine, or perhaps somewhere else in the local area. Many who have seen the O'Shaughnessy name in our capital city have a vague awareness that he was a generous benefactor, especially of educational institutions. Yet if you were to ask any number of individuals who O'Shaughnessy was, in all likelihood few would be able to tell you more about the man than his initials: I. A.

I. A. O'Shaughnessy was born in Stillwater, Minnesota, in 1885, but beginning in 1928, he and his wife, Lillian, made their home and raised their family in St. Paul. I. A., however, made his fortune in the oil refining business outside Minnesota. Consequently he was often away from their Summit Avenue residence tending to his many business activities in Oklahoma, Kansas, Illinois, or Washington, D.C. Thus I. A. O'Shaughnessy was less well known in his home community than he deserved.

In this issue, authors John M. Lindley and Virginia Brainard Kunz have combined their talents to provide the first wide-ranging biographical profile of I. A. O'Shaughnessy's life, business career, and personal and institutional philanthropy. They have used many documentary, business, family, and institutional records as well as extensive interviews with O'Shaughnessy family members and others who knew I. A. in writing this profile. The Ramsey County Historical Society hopes that the readers of our history quarterly will find that these authors have not only shed much light on the little-known career of the man who was once honored with the title of "Mr. St. Paul—A Great St. Paulite," but have also heightened local awareness of his great generosity to people and institutions in St. Paul and around the nation.

*Marlene Marschall, President, Ramsey County Historical Society*

# Letters to the Editor

## **An Electronic Glitch**

I noticed that your Fall issue was dated 2001. Have I missed a few years somewhere? I thought last fall was 2003.

*Madelyne Becker, Minneapolis.*

*It was and you haven't missed a few years. The problem was the sort of glitch in production that can happen in this electronic era. An old "standing" electronic file with the names of officers and board members for that year was never deleted and was picked up by mistake.*

## **Which Union Depot?**

On page 8 of your excellent issue for Spring, 2003, you identified Assumption Church as the only building still standing today that Sitting Bull visited while in St. Paul. On page 6 you show the interior of the St. Paul Union Depot. Isn't that building the same as the one standing today?

*John M. Baker, Lilydale*

*There are older buildings in St. Paul that are still standing, such as the William Dahl house that was built on East Thirteenth Street and the Coney Island on St. Peter Street, but we're uncertain as to whether Sitting Bull would have visited them. The Union Depot is not the present day depot which was built between 1917 and 1923. Sitting Bull arrived in St. Paul at the old Union Depot built in the mid-1880s on the site of today's Post Office building.*

## **J. J. Hill and His Office**

What can you tell me about the Great Northern building that stands just down the street from the Union Depot?

*Paul Meiers, New Brighton*

*It was built in 1887 for James J. Hill as*

*the headquarters for his Great Northern Railway and played a major role in the development of railroads in the Upper Midwest. Located at 281-299 East Kellogg Boulevard, it was constructed of red brick with a central sandstone arch and brick arches over the windows. A cast iron gate and archway on the Broadway side of the building leads to an inner courtyard where Hill tethered his horse. The railway maintained its headquarters here until it moved to the Railroad and Bank building (now First Trust Center) in 1917, shortly after Hill's death in 1916.*

## **What Was Globe?**

My great grandfather, Martin L. Ryan's occupation is listed in the 1900 census as a collector for Globe. Can you tell what Globe was? He was living at 704 E. 6th Street in St. Paul in 1900 and did so until his death in 1908. He had moved to St. Paul from Illinois about 1883.

*Michael J. Ryan, Wilkesboro, NC.*

*There are several possibilities. The Globe was either a newspaper, a hotel, or a business college. We assume that he worked for the newspaper, since all the directory says is the Globe.*

## **Richards Gordon School**

Can you give me a short history of the old Richards Gordon elementary school on Marshall avenue near Snelling?

*Thomas Joerger, Landisville, PA*

*The school, named for the founder of a famous pioneer fur company here, was built in 1911 at a cost of around \$38,107. It was designed by Ray R. Gauger, the son of architect August R. Gauger. The brick school, at 1619 Dayton, is an example of the Beaux Arts*

*style popular in St. Paul from the 1890s to World War I.*

## **Dr. Ancker and His Hospital**

I'm looking for information about a distant relative, a Dr. Ancker, who I understand was the founder of Ancker Hospital early in the nineteenth century.

*Henry Levi, Atlanta, GA*

*Ramsey County History carried a history of the hospital in a 1987 issue of this magazine. Ancker was born in Baltimore, MD, March 20, 1851. He graduated in 1882 from the Medical School of Ohio, Cincinnati, and almost immediately began to practice in St. Paul. In 1883 he was named superintendent of the city and county hospital. In 1887 he persuaded the city to build a new hospital, which opened in 1895. It was one of the largest and best institutions west of Chicago. Ancker is said to have designed the first automobile ambulance in 1912. He also added a department for crippled children. He died in 1923 in his office of heart disease.*

## **A Haunted House?**

My parents have owned a duplex at 764 E. 6th Street for about the last twenty-five years. We always thought the house was haunted (ghost sightings). A family friend told us its past owner was "old man Carr" and that he had owned the house and had lived there. Can you give me any more information?

*Geliene Steinmaus, St. Paul*

*A Henry F. Carr did live there. He probably moved there in 1959 or the early 1960s. He worked as a mechanic at the East Side Motor Sales. Our records, unfortunately, do not list a ghost in residence as well.*



*A crane installs the Globe Oil & Refining Company sign at the company's McPherson, Kansas, refinery in 1933. Photo reproduced by permission from the private collections of the Lario Oil & Gas Company. See article beginning on page 4.*

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