

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Winter, 2006

Volume 40, Number 4

Growing Up in St. Paul
The Andahazy School of
Classical Ballet

Page 16

“The Greatest Single Industry”
Crex: Created Out of Nothing

—Page 4



This 1901 American Grass Twine publicity photo shows a room furnished and decorated almost entirely with wire grass products. The company processed all of the raw material and manufactured the floor coverings in St. Paul. It made the wicker items in New York. The wall matting and picture frames were probably made specially for this photograph. American Grass Twine later became Crex Carpet Company. Photo from *Creating New Industries in the Minnesota Historical Society collections*.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 40, Number 4

Winter 2006

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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Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr.
and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

In this era when we seek to use natural products in new ways, we will enjoy reading Paul
Nelson's lead article depicting a once-flourishing Ramsey County industry that manufactured
twine, furniture, and carpet from a forgotten resource: wire grass! A modern-day visit to Crex
Meadows in Wisconsin will evoke memories of workers harvesting this dense material, which
was twisted and bent into wicker furniture that once graced the porches of St. Paul neighbor-
hoods. A detailed portrait of the founders of the Andahazy dance studio, an account of an early
rabies outbreak, and two book reviews round out this diverse issue.

We welcome as our new editor John Lindley, who takes the position following his tenure as
editorial board chair. John brings to his new job years of professional publishing experience and
a practiced, conscientious approach to the complex task of producing this magazine on a quar-
terly basis. Under his committed leadership we will maintain the high standards of content and
production that have garnered *Ramsey County History* two national awards. As we greet John,
we dearly miss our founding editor, Virginia Brainard Kunz, whom we profile in this issue. Her
keen intelligence, lively curiosity, and abiding compassion have long guided our interest in local
history, and she will always live on in our hearts.

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

Virginia Brainard Kunz 1921-2006

A Remembrance

Virginia Brainard Kunz, editor
of *Ramsey County History* for
more than forty years, died
on January 7, 2006, in
Minneapolis. Members and
supporters of the Ramsey
County Historical Society will
miss Virginia's deft editorial
hand, her nearly encyclopedic
knowledge of St. Paul history,
and her talent as a writer.



Born in 1921 in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Virginia
graduated from Iowa State University in 1943 with
a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter the
Minneapolis Tribune hired Virginia. Her work with
the newspaper involved cropping and sizing photos
for news stories, writing short articles, and crafting
headlines. These skills would serve her well when in
1962 she became the Ramsey County Historical
Society's executive secretary. Two years later, Virginia
founded *Ramsey County History*. At the time the
Society's magazine came out twice a year. It expanded
to quarterly publication in 1989. In 1973 the Society
made Virginia its executive director, a position she
held until her retirement sixteen years later.

During her tenure as executive director, Virginia
oversaw the Society's move from offices at the Gibbs
Farm Museum (now the Gibbs Museum of Pioneer
and Dakotah Life) in Falcon Heights to larger
quarters in the Landmark Center in downtown
St. Paul. In the 1970s she was one of a number of
civic-minded leaders who were involved in persuading
St. Paul and Ramsey County officials to restore the
old Federal Courts Building and convert it to the
Landmark Center. A skilled manager, Virginia also
oversaw the growth of the Society from operating two
afternoons a week on an annual budget of \$10,000
to more than 1,200 members and a budget that
exceeded \$500,000 at the time of her retirement.

In addition to all the responsibilities she had as
executive director of the Society, Virginia found time
(continued on the reverse)

to write fifteen books, three of which were histories of St. Paul. Her two best-known books are probably *St. Paul: Saga of an American City* (1980) and *St. Paul: The First 150 Years* (1991), but she also authored a number of corporate and institutional histories. RCHS published Virginia's last book, *Bought 2 Horses & a Wagon: The Story of the Murphy Companies*, in late 2004.

Following her retirement, Virginia edited the magazine from her home and kept in frequent touch with authors, Society members, staff personnel, and her many contacts in journalism and local history. She also wrote many articles for *Ramsey County History*, including extended biographical profiles of local leaders Richard C. Lilly, Lucius P. Ordway, and I. A. O'Shaughnessy.

As editor, Virginia strived to make sure that contributors to the magazine got their facts correct. She also wanted to publish history that told a good story. This attitude reflected her training as a journalist. Its importance came through in the positive feedback about the magazine that the Society received from readers over the years. Twice during her years as editor, *Ramsey County History* earned an award for excellence from the American Association for State and Local History.

Virginia evaluated potential articles on the merit of their content and value as historical research. Thus she fostered an open approach to new or different topics in local history. Many of the authors who worked with Virginia would tell her of other historians she might like to contact on behalf of the magazine or they would volunteer an idea for a future article that would appeal to the magazine's readers. In the words of Mary Lethert Wingerd, one of today's foremost historians of St. Paul, Virginia "was a master at making our history accessible to the public." Virginia was actively working on the Winter 2006 issue when she fell ill just over a week before her death.

Virginia is survived by a daughter and a son and four grandchildren. Her family has indicated that memorials to Virginia are preferred to the Ramsey County Historical Society. The Society's Board of Directors is currently considering how it can honor permanently Virginia's long service to the Society, to the community, and to history.

J. M. L.

Letters to the Editor

We Erred

The editor apologizes for the errors that occurred in the Fall 2005 issue of this magazine. We encourage our readers to learn more about the Andahazys beginning on page 16 of this issue.

My letter is in reference to the photograph on p. 26 of Mr. and Mrs. Lorand (Lorant) Andahazy and a portion of the text referring to them on p. 27 of the Summer 2005 issue of *Ramsey County History*.

Although this photo appeared in the 1961-62 season book, it is one of a series of Constantine photos taken during the 1950s. The Andahazys were not refugees who fled Europe during World War II. Mrs. Andahazy (née Shirley Bridge) was born in New York and as a young girl joined the de Basil Ballet Russe—the first American girl to do so. Mr. Andahazy came to Ohio with his family in the 1920s from Hungary, following World War I. He studied ballet in Ohio and also joined the Ballet Russe. The Andahazys were married just prior to Lorand being drafted into the U.S. Army in the beginning of World War II.

Sandra (Snell) Weinberg
OCTOBER 27, 2005

More on Parking Garages

Steve Trimble has kindly alerted me to the attention recently paid in *Ramsey County History* to parking and parking ramps, initially in an article by Bob Garland and then in one written by Mr. Trimble himself. Their work merits the attention paid to the subject in your distinguished format. As the coauthor of the recently published *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (2005), I was pleased to read Garland's and Trimble's work.

Parking is something everyone ex-

periences, even if they are not drivers of motor vehicles and especially if they are urban dwellers. For almost ninety years, cities, big and small, have increasing surrendered some of their most convenient locations to sustaining automobiles, vans, trucks, and busses at rest. At first, entrepreneurs welcomed parked motor vehicles in the belief that they would fortify businesses downtown. The more drivers that came, however, the less there seemed to be available parking. As the suburbs were opened to strip development in response to increasingly congested center cities, urban businesspeople often abandoned their place in those congested locations and/or argued for more off-street parking in those congested centers. Free parking worked to draw people back downtown although without realizing that the cost of parking garages and surface lots could be passed on to consumers in the cost of business operations.

The result has produced cities less full of pedestrian traffic and given to voids in lots and bland garages. Only comparatively recently have designers created multilevel garages and surface lots with more than functional design, creating architecturally appealing facades and plantings on ground level.

The landscape has a way of reflecting human values that often engenders strong responses. In turn, people often remake their physical environment to suit changing needs. Thank you for helping to make us aware of these considerations and ones rooted in well-documented historical research.

Keith A. Sculle

Keith A. Sculle works in Education Services at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Where were the Orphanages?

Can you tell me where the Ramsey

County Orphanages and the Poor Farms were located in St. Paul?

Gerl Opsal

The Ramsey County Poor Farm is located today at 2020 N. White Bear Avenue. The barn has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and is still standing. Before 1885, the Poor Farm was on the present site of the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. The only listing we could find of a "Ramsey County Orphanage" is the Ramsey County Girls Home School at 680 Stewart Avenue, which is off West Seventh Street.

The Colonnade

What is its history of that interesting red brick building on St. Peter Street that is known as the Colonnade? Was it a hotel at one point?

Val Struck

The Renaissance Revival Hotel at 554 St. Peter was built in 1889 and extensively remodeled in 1899 with new facades and a skylight. From 1891 to 1941 the building was variously known as the Colonnade, The Willard Hotel, The Alexandria Apartments, The Rex Arm Apartments, and again The Willard. It was once a popular hotel, often used for conventions in the early twentieth century. It is one of the few hotels still standing on St. Peter that date from the 1880s and the 1890s when St. Peter was a major hotel district. A disastrous fire on December 13, 1955 caused the death of a hotel chambermaid and severely damaged the building. The top two floors, including an elaborate cornice, were removed after the fire. There also have been alterations to the storefronts.



Anna and Lorand Andahazy as Zobeide and the Golden Slave in Scheherazade. Miss Dee Studio photo, 1964, courtesy of Marius Andahazy.

R.C.H.S.
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