

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

*Louis and Maybelle:*

*Somewhere Out  
in the West*

John W. Larson

—page 13

**Winter 2011**

Volume 45, Number 4

*“We Can Do Better with a Chisel or a Hammer”  
Appreciating Mary Colter and Her Roots in St. Paul  
Diane Trout-Oertel, page 3*



Artist Arthur F. Matthews painted the portrait of Mary Jane Elizabeth Colter seen above in about 1890, when she graduated from the California School of Design. Colter subsequently taught art for many years at Mechanic Arts High School in St. Paul and later designed eight buildings at the Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona. Shown here is Hermit's Rest, located at the westernmost stop on the south rim, a building that Colter designed in 1914. The Colter portrait is reproduced courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Flagstaff, Ariz. Photograph of Hermit's Rest courtesy of Alexander Vertikoff. Hermit's Rest copyright © Alexander Vertikoff.

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

*Executive Director*

Priscilla Farnham

*Founding Editor (1964–2006)*

Virginia Brainard Kunz

*Editor*

John M. Lindley

## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul A. Verret

*President*

Cheryl Dickson

*First Vice President*

William Frels

*Second Vice President*

Julie Brady

*Secretary*

Carolyn J. Brusseau

*Treasurer*

Thomas H. Boyd

*Immediate Past President*

Norlin Boyum, Anne Cowie, Nancy Randall Dana, Cheryl Dickson, Charlton Dietz, Joanne A. Englund, William Frels, Howard Guthmann, Richard Heydinger, John Holman, Kenneth R. Johnson, Elizabeth M. Kiernat, Rev. Kevin M. McDonough, Nancy McKillips, Susan McNeely, Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy, Richard H. Nicholson, Marla Ordway, Jay Pfaender, Jeffrey Slack, Ralph Thrane, Richard Wilhoit.

### *Directors Emeriti*

W. Andrew Boss

Richard T. Murphy Sr.

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Anne Cowie, *chair*; James B. Bell, Thomas H. Boyd, John Diers, John Milton, Debra Mitts-Smith, Laurie M. Murphy, Paul D. Nelson, Richard H. Nicholson, Jay Pfaender, David Riehle, G. Richard Slade, Steve Trimble, Paul A. Verret, Mary Lethert Wingerd.

### HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

William Fallon, William Finney, George Latimer, Joseph S. Micallef, Marvin J. Pertzik, James Reagan, Rosalie E. Wahl.

### RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, chair

Commissioner Tony Bennett

Commissioner Toni Carter

Commissioner Jim McDonough

Commissioner Rafael Ortega

Commissioner Jan Parker

Commissioner Janice Rettman

Julie Kleinschmidt, manager,  
Ramsey County

*Ramsey County History* is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2011, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. **All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher.** The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Fax 651-223-8539; e-mail address: admin@rchs.com; web site address: www.rchs.com

# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 45, Number 4

Winter 2011

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

## CONTENTS

- 3 “We Can Do Better with a Chisel and a Hammer”  
Appreciating Mary Colter and Her Roots in St. Paul  
*Diane Trout-Oertel*
- 13 *Growing Up in St. Paul*  
Louis and Maybelle: Somewhere Out in the West  
*John W. Larson*
- 20 “Write Us in Your Own Way”  
A Tombstone from the Sears Catalog  
*Janice R. Quick*
- 23 *What Readers Are Saying about*  
*The Dutiful Son*, Louis W. Hill, and Glacier National Park
- 27 *Book Review*

*Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from 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

Sometimes Ramsey County is a jumping-off point. In this issue, Diane Trout-Oertel examines the career of Mary Colter, a St. Paul-born designer and architect who learned her craft here, taught at Mechanic Arts High School, and later moved west to design buildings and interiors for the Fred Harvey Company at the Grand Canyon. The article traces Colter’s ties with the Arts and Crafts movement and the integration of Native American traditions in her designs. On another level, John Larson portrays an evocative view of his aunt and her husband, who also “take off” for the West as proprietors of a nightclub hotel in a Montana boom town, which flourished during the construction of the Fort Peck Dam. And the use of the mail to move substantial goods became prevalent in the early twentieth century, as shown in Janice Quick’s sketch of the process of buying a tombstone from none other than Sears, Roebuck. Finally, we share a book review and some new perspectives relating to the life of Louis W. Hill Sr., as shown in Biloine Young and Eileen McCormack’s recent book, *The Dutiful Son*. Happy winter reading.

*Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board*

---

## “Write Us in Your Own Way”

# A Tombstone from the Sears, Roebuck Catalog

*Janice R. Quick*

**A**t the home they had shared with their mother on Marshall Avenue, Katherine Rittle and two of her sisters opened their 1909 issue of the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog<sup>1</sup> and proceeded to order the headstone which would mark their mother’s grave at Calvary Cemetery in St. Paul.<sup>2</sup>

Katherine, age thirty-five and single, was a teacher at Ramsey grade school on Cambridge Avenue in the city.<sup>3</sup> Her sister Anna, thirty-nine and also single, was a teacher at Douglas grade school on Stevens Avenue. Her sister Rose, twenty-three and single, was also a teacher in St. Paul.<sup>4</sup> Although their reading and arithmetic skills were probably better than those of the average catalog customer, they might have felt uneasy about making such an important purchase through the mail. To calm the apprehensions of potential customers, the catalog promised a money-back guarantee, and it provided encouragement with instructions like these, printed in English, Swedish, and German:

Don’t be afraid you will make a mistake in making out the order. We receive hundreds of orders every day from young and old, who never before sent away orders for goods. We are accustomed to handling all kinds of orders.

Write us [a letter] in your own way, in any language, and don’t worry whether your writing is good or poor. We will be able to read it all right.

Enclose in the letter the proper amount of money in the form of a postoffice money order, which you buy at the postoffice, or an express money order, which you buy from any express agent, or a draft, which you can buy at any bank, or you can put the money itself in a letter and take it to the postoffice and tell your postmaster that you want him to register it to us. If you live on a rural mail route, just give the letter and the money to the mail carrier and ask him to buy a money order

at the postoffice for you and to put it in the envelope with your order and mail it to us.<sup>5</sup>

With their confidence hopefully bolstered by these gentle instructions, the Rittle sisters turned to page 873 of the catalog, where ten gravestones were described and illustrated. Five stones were small upright tablets, in blue-hued marble or white clouded marble on concrete bases, priced from \$3.60 to \$11.25. One of these five stones incorporated the polished image of a heart, where the name and death date of a loved one might be displayed. Another stone included the words “Our Darling Baby” carved along the rim of a circle; inside the circle, a tender message might be added. A third stone presented the carved image of a dove and two olive branches. A fourth stone boasted a decorative peak.

The fifth stone was designed to mark the grave of a child. The tablet was topped with a sculpture of a slumbering lamb, a symbol of the peace and innocence of a sleeping child. This stone was similar to ones produced by various stonecutters who were not affiliated with Sears, Roebuck & Company. The Sears, Roebuck headstone was distinguished by the dozing posture of the lamb, and by the small size of the tablet, which was only 12 inches wide, 14 inches high, and 4 inches thick.<sup>6</sup>

A sixth stone illustrated on that page was a tall marble obelisk which provided four surfaces where names and dates could be carved. The peak of the stone presented four arched panels, each decorated with a stylized floral design. The

price was \$7.48 in blue marble, or \$9.50 in white marble. This style of headstone was also produced by many stonecutters who were not employees of Sears, Roebuck.

A seventh headstone displayed an intricate scene of the gates to Heaven. In this depiction, Heaven resembled a city of mosques in the Middle East. This stone was priced at \$24.60 for blue marble, or \$30.90 for white marble. Two other headstones illustrated in the catalog featured polished surfaces for display of a name, but were otherwise nondescript.

Katherine Rittle and her sisters selected a stalwart stately headstone of gray Barre granite from Vermont, with raised images of a pillared mausoleum and a swag of laurel leaves. The pillars were intended to represent symbolically the entrance to Heaven, and laurel leaves have long been a symbol of victory, peace, and honor. A section of rough “uncarved” stonework partly concealed these images, which suggested the inability of the living to depict the afterlife.<sup>7</sup>

This headstone was available in seven sizes. The Rittle sisters decided upon a mid-size stone in which the tablet was 44 inches wide, 48 inches high, and 18 inches thick. The base was 53 inches by 30 inches, and 12 inches high. The price of this stone was \$157.00.<sup>8</sup>

Inscriptions could be added to any of the Sears, Roebuck headstones, in a choice of styles and sizes. Simple V-sunk letters were recommended for poems, Bible verses, and lengthy sentiments. A stonecutter created each section of a V-sunk letter by placing the blade of a chisel at a slight angle against the granite, then gently tapping the head of the chisel to dislodge a bit of granite. The blade was then placed at an equal, opposing angle, so tapping the head of the chisel removed another bit of granite. The two

angles formed a V-shaped impression in the granite. V-sunk letters up to one inch in height increased the price of the stone by ten cents per letter.

Raised letters were created when a stonecutter stenciled the outline of large letters onto the granite, then chiseled away the surrounding granite. The Rittles elected to have their last name inscribed at the center of their mother's stone, in raised letters 4½ inches high. For the six letters in their name, this increased the price of the stone by \$2.64.

The tablet portion of the Rittle stone weighed approximately 3,200 pounds (Barre granite weighs 180 pounds per cubic foot).<sup>9</sup> The concrete base weighed approximately 1,375 pounds. Rail freight was calculated at 49¢ per hundred pounds, for transportation from a granite quarry and stone-cutting center in Vermont to a railroad warehouse in St. Paul. Freight for the Rittle stone, and the wooden crate in which it was shipped, added approximately \$24 to their costs. A message in the catalog defended the freight rate, and guaranteed safe transportation of the headstone:

While Vermont may seem a long distance from your home [railroad] station, and suggest a high cost of freight, causing you to hesitate to order from a distance, yet, re-



The Sears-Roebuck catalog of 1909 offered ten gravestones, priced from \$3.60 to \$385.00. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

member, the rate of freight is very low on monuments; remember, we will make to order for you any tombstone or monument illustrated on this page. . . . and ship it to you with the distinct understanding and agreement that it shall be a big saving to you, even if you have paid the freight; guarantee it to be finished exactly as you have ordered it, and if it does not reach you free from mar-

scratch or injury in transportation, you can hold it subject to our disposal at our loss, and we will not only refund you the money you have remitted to us, but will include any freight charges you may have paid.<sup>10</sup>

The Rittle headstone arrived safely at the railroad warehouse, approximately twelve weeks from the date it was ordered. The Rittle sisters likely hired day

## Other Pillar-and-Swag Headstones from Sears, Roebuck

Seven Sears, Roebuck and Company headstones in the pillar-and-swag style, including that of Annie Rittle, have been found in the Minnesota counties of Dakota, Goodhue, Hennepin, Ramsey, Rice, Wabasha, and Washington. They honor these individuals:

John Armstrong 1850–1905 (dry goods store co-owner); his wife Annie 1850–1926 (milliner); Jonathan Kerr 1859–1906 (department store co-owner and dry goods store coowner); his wife Elizabeth “Lizzie” 1853–1918 (milliner); and their infant son 1887–1887 (memorialized with a footstone, but not interred at this site): Lakewood Cemetery, Minneapolis, Hennepin County.

Thomas “T.C.” Davis 1830–1912 (banker and real estate investor); his wife Elisabeth 1840–1913; their infant daughter Jennie 1864–1864 (memorialized with a footstone, but not interred at this cemetery): Lakeside Cemetery, Hastings, Dakota County.

Hans Hulebak 1843–1923 (farmer), his wife Anna 1865–1915; their son Paul 1884–1974, and daughter-in-law Olivia 1889–1977: Gol Lutheran Church Cemetery, Kenyon, Goodhue County.

James Langton 1832–1904 (farmer), his wife Agnes 1832–1905; their daughter Anna 1868–1945; and Maggie Campbell

1879–1896: Oak Hill Cemetery, Minneapolis, Hennepin County.

John Mussehl 1847–1911 (lumber yard laborer) and his wife Ann 1849–1937: Maple Lawn Cemetery, Faribault, Rice County.

Annie Rittle 1849–1905; estranged husband Joseph 1846–1917; their daughters Anna 1870–1928 and Mary 1864–1947: Calvary Cemetery, St. Paul, Ramsey County.

Marina Russell 1821–1897; her daughter Martha 1843–1860; and son F. A. “Fred” 1860–1929: Oakland Cemetery, Lake City, Wabasha County.

labor to load the headstone onto a dray, drawn by horses or oxen. The dray carried the stone to Calvary Cemetery, where a block and tackle system allowed the hired help or cemetery staff to hoist the stone into position at the gravesite. With the wages of the day labor added to the cost of the stone, the total expense for purchase and transportation of the stone was an estimated \$190, an amount roughly equivalent to \$4,550 in today's economy.

Only seven Sears, Roebuck headstones in the pillar-and-swag style have been found in the Minnesota counties of Dakota, Goodhue, Hennepin, Ramsey, Rice, Wabasha, and Washington. None of the other styles illustrated in the 1909 catalog have been found in those counties. The five styles in small marble tablets might not have survived Minnesota winters or modern lawnmowers. Larger marble headstones might not have been ordered from the catalog because similar styles were available through Minnesota stonecutters. Other styles were likely illustrated and described in a Sears, Roebuck catalog titled *Tombstones and Monuments*,<sup>11</sup> but a message in the mass-



*The three Rittle sisters selected this Sears, Roebuck headstone to remember their mother at Calvary Cemetery. Photo (2009) courtesy of Janice Quick.*

mailed general catalogs of 1912 and 1913 discouraged customers from requesting a specialty catalog:

Before writing for any special catalog, refer to the pages of this big General Catalog to see whether the goods you want to buy are shown in this Big Catalog. If they are shown in this Big Catalog you can avoid the delay of waiting for a special catalog. . . .

Do not send for a special catalog . . . unless you are sure the goods you want to buy are not shown in this Big Catalog.<sup>12</sup>

Over the years, the Rittle grave marker and at least six other pillar-and-swag headstones from Sears, Roebuck, in sturdy granite, have withstood many harsh Minnesota winters and defied the hazards of modern grounds keeping. They stand as timeless testimonials to the consumer choices of at least seven Minnesota households and silently acknowledge how mail-order catalogs influenced Minnesotans in the first decades of the twentieth century.

*Janice Quick conducts tombstone tours at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Maplewood, Minnesota. She is a member of the Maplewood Area Historical Society.*

## Endnotes

1. The pillar-and-swag style of tombstone ordered by the Rittle sisters might also have been available from the 1906 issue of the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog. That catalog included five pages of tombstones, but an original of the catalog is not available. A reproduction of the catalog deleted three pages of tombstones; the remaining pages did not include the pillar-and-swag style, but Lakewood Cemetery records verify the base for the Kerr/Armstrong pillar-and-swag headstone, listed in the sidebar, was placed in 1906. No catalog was issued in 1907 or 1908.

2. Chester Schoenrock affirmed the Rittle headstone was cut from Barre granite, quarried in Barre, Vermont, as advertised in the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog of 1909. He also affirmed that it would not have been until the 1930s that local stonecutters would have possessed the skills or tools to produce granite headstones in the pillar-and-swag style. Chester's grandfather William Schoenrock had been employed as a stonecutter for several local firms, before founding William Schoenrock Monuments in 1910, on today's Jackson Street, opposite Oakland Cemetery. Chester's father Raymond Schoenrock joined the firm as a stone-

cutter in 1919. Chester grew up in the family business. He graduated in 1950 from the Barre School of Memorial Art, in Barre, Vermont, and then rejoined the family firm in St. Paul. Chester continued the family business until his death in 2010. He had long been acclaimed the local authority on cemetery markers and their makers.

3. Katherine Rittle Marshall was later principal at Neill grade school on Farrington Avenue, then at Randolph Heights grade school on Hamline Avenue.

4. *R. L. Polk & Co. St. Paul City Directory 1909* (St. Paul: R. L. Polk & Co., 1909).

5. *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue No. 119* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck & Co., 1909). A copy of this catalog is available at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

6. The author found no example of this headstone in the Minnesota counties of Dakota, Goodhue, Hennepin, Ramsey, Rice, Wabasha, and Washington.

7. The design of the Rittle headstone matches the illustration in the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog of 1909. A competitor produced a similar stone in which a series of drilled holes outline the

shape of a ribbon bow at the right-hand tip of the swag, as though the image is not yet complete. This suggests a sense of "unfinished business." Examples of the competitor's design may be seen on the Sahl headstone at Gol Lutheran Church cemetery in Kenyon; a Johnson gravesite in the Vasa Swedish Methodist Cemetery; the Ingeman grave at the Vasa Lutheran Cemetery; and the Hoffman grave at Maple Lawn Cemetery in Faribault.

8. The catalog stated prices for three of the seven sizes. The probable price of a mid-size stone was \$157.

9. Based on the author's discussions with Chester Schoenrock (William Schoenrock & Son Monuments) in 2010.

10. *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue No. 119* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck & Co., 1909).

11. The general catalog of 1918 advertised a *Tombstones and Monuments* specialty catalog. The same general catalog did not offer the pillar-and-swag headstone. The general catalog of 1926–27 did not mention headstones.

12. *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck & Co., 1912), 16.

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society  
323 Landmark Center  
75 West Fifth Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Paul, MN  
Permit #3989

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**



*Mary Colter designed Hopi House at the Grand Canyon National Park in 1905. It is one of the eight buildings at the Grand Canyon that Colter designed over a period of about thirty years. For more on Mary Colter and her connection to St. Paul, see page 3. Photograph of Hopi House courtesy of Alexander Vertikoff. Hopi House © Alexander Vertikoff.*