

RAMSEY COUNTY
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The Prince and
The Pearl of
Great Price

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Fall, 2004

Volume 39, Number 3

Another Lost Neighborhood

The Life and Death of Central Park—
A Small Part of the Past Illuminated

—Page 4



A postcard view of the state Capitol in its heyday when the greenery of grass and trees surrounded Central Park. A layered-cement parking ramp has replaced the park. See the article beginning on page 4 that traces the life and death of Central Park, another of St. Paul's Lost Neighborhoods. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 39, Number 3

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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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A Message from the Editorial Board

Born in the 1880s and died in the 1970s, Central Park in St. Paul has today passed into urban legend. Fortunately, Paul Nelson has carefully researched the park's history and his account opens our Fall issue. In 1884 four wealthy and powerful St. Paul families donated the land that became Central Park, a rather small space that was laid out formally with walkways, trees, and shrubs and included an ornate fountain. Unlike Como Park, whose city-led development later in the decade was intended as a naturalistic refuge, the practical donors of the land for Central Park conceived it as a neat buffer for their homes against haphazard urban sprawl nearby. Today, or course, all that remains of Central Park is a parking ramp for state government workers.

In celebration of Hamline University's sesquicentennial in 2004, we have John Larson's elegant account of the all-to-brief time that Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein spent at the liberal-arts school in the fall of 1942. Prince Hubertus had a profound impact on students such as Larson through his courageous opposition to the forces of Nazism. Scion of an old and noble German family, Prince Hubertus had fled to the United States in the early 1930s and subsequently worked tirelessly to persuade Americans of the dangers of Hitlerism. Hamline proved to be a generous and supportive host to the prince at a time when the United States was just entering the fight against fascism.

Our Fall issue concludes with the second in a series of Rondo oral histories. Thanks once more to the interviewing skills of Kate Cavett, we learn of the youth, educational, and employment experiences of Kathryn Coram Gagnon, a graduate of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Mass., who spent much of her adult life as a social worker in the Rondo community.

As a service to the Society's members and friends, we want all of our readers to know that there is now a complete listing of articles that have appeared in *Ramsey County History* over the past forty years on the Society's web site at www.rchs.com. We hope you'll make use of this tool when you want to see if a past issue of our magazine has information bearing on a question about St. Paul or Ramsey County.

John Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

his stay, he wrote as a dedication the first lines from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which begins "In the midst of the way of our life. . . ." This fragment remained cryptic for me until recently when I considered the complete line in Dante: "In the midst of the way of our life, we found ourselves in a dark wood." As used by Hubertus, it was, I now realize, a metaphor which alluded generally to the inferno of the war and particularly, for him, the special hell of exile.

I might never have guessed that our gracious and cosmopolitan guest found exile painful. One pleasantly fresh autumn afternoon, I met him at the Hamline library. We had agreed to share a long walk northward over the train tracks to the state fairgrounds and to Como Park. No one was about. We visited the Conservatory with its tropical atmosphere, tall exotic palms, and unfamiliar vegetation.

The Unhappy Raccoon

Then we discovered a small zoo. At its center was a large cage with rocks, running water, and an unhappy raccoon running back and forth around the outside limits of his cage. Then, either because of something the prince said, or because I caught his mood, I realized he felt an extraordinary compassion for the trapped animal, a poignant similarity between the raccoon's predicament and his own. Over the years, he repeatedly referred to the incident in his letters. The now classic "Raccoon at Como Park" became a code phrase when he wished to indicate acute dissatisfaction with where he was and what he was doing as Europe continued to be ravaged by a frightful war. This shared experience became a milestone marking a significant event of our friendship.

Hubertus completed his lectures at Hamline on November 13, 1942, and left St. Paul on the night train for Chicago. The realities of war, the emphasis on the useful sciences, and induction into the armed services again dominated campus life. The message the prince left behind was not soon forgotten, however. On November 20 the *Hamline Oracle* commented that "Although Prince Loewenstein was here for only six weeks, it seems as though he had been here for years. Indeed, after his

The Prince and The Fascists

Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein-Wertheim-Freudenberg, a courtly man once described as "one of the most courageous opponents of Hitler," was born in 1906 into an old German noble family. Soon after Hitler came to power in 1933, the prince and his wife, their lives threatened by the Nazis, fled to the United States. There, as a refugee, he embarked on a decades-long mission, lecturing tirelessly, denouncing Hitler, anti-Semitism, and totalitarianism, and predicting that such a course would erupt into World War II.

At the end of that war, he returned to Germany where he served for four years in the West German Parliament as a member of the liberal Free Democratic Party. He also continued to lecture around the world on behalf of the West German government. A man of letters, as was his father, a cavalry officer in a pre-World War I Bavarian regiment, the prince wrote more than forty books. In *The Tragedy of a Nation*, published in England in 1934, he labeled the leaders of the Nazi party as "cowards to the very bone."

Prince Loewenstein, as he was known in America, also was a prominent Roman Catholic layman. Pope John XXIII decorated him for his role in working toward the reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches.

The prince, who lived in Bad Godesbern, outside of Bonn, died in 1984 at the age of seventy-eight.



A portrait of Prince Loewenstein painted in Paris in 1938 by Paul Hammaux. It now hangs in the Historische Museum in Berlin. This copy of the painting is from the author.

first week here he was as much at home on the campus as Old Main."

The *Oracle* described Prince Loewenstein as a "likeable, loveable man, a European gentleman and a scholar whose outlook was world wide." He was a man, the *Oracle* said, who always had time, despite his busy schedule, for whoever stopped to chat with him. He was a prince who was "more democratic than most of us," and he had given Hamline something to think about. "Let us keep on thinking about it now that he's gone."

Hamline did not forget. On May 23, 1943, Hubertus returned briefly to accept the University's honorary degree of Doc-

tor of Letters. I was not able to be there for the presentation. I had been inducted into military service and we were given ten days to put our affairs in order before earnestly becoming soldiers. When the prince learned of my impending induction earlier that month, he wrote that I should make plans so that after the official college events "we could drive into the Minnesota woods or lakes regions, find a log cabin, and live for two days the way I read back in Europe, and as a small boy, that most Americans live—as trappers, hunters, fishermen, watching out for red Indians and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes."



3886. CENTRAL PARK. ST. PAUL.
The James Humphrey house on the left, the Gustave Schurmeier rowhouses on the right. See article, "The Life and Death of Central Park," beginning on page 4.

R.C.H.S.
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