

By the Numbers . . .

Sinclair Lewis was the first US citizen to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. The Minnesota-born author, whose doctor father once worried his son would never make anything of himself, wrote twenty-three novels, many of which were adapted to film.

Interscholastic athletic teams on which Harry Sinclair Lewis played in high school:

0^a

By 1930, languages into which one or more of Lewis's novels had been translated:

13^b

Main Street's rank on the Modern Library list of 100 Best Novels:

68^c

Appearances on college syllabi of Sinclair Lewis's work:

399^d

Rank of Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* on Amazon's Top 100 list in January 2017:

4^e

Minnesota-born writers who have won the Nobel Prize for Literature:

2^f

To learn more about the author, see Ralph L. Goldstein's article "The View from Summit Avenue: Inspiration Point for Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*" on page 12.

SOURCES: See page 23.

ON THE COVER

Portrait of Nellie Griswold Francis by artist Jennifer Soriano, based on an image from *The Appeal*, May 7, 1921. Original is a 16" x 11" charcoal drawing with sprayed gouache and a Sumi-nagashi ink print wash on heavyweight watercolor paper, which will be part of an upcoming *Persistence: Continuing the Struggle for Suffrage and Equality, 1848–2020* exhibition at Ramsey County Historical Society. Art courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society. Cameo images from *Musical America* 28. Courtesy of University of Minnesota Libraries.



Contents

- 1 *Votes for "Everywoman"*
Nellie Griswold Francis, the Women of Rondo, and Their Suffrage Crusade
LEETTA M. DOUGLAS
- 12 **The View from Summit Avenue: Inspiration Point for Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street***
RALPH L. GOLDSTEIN
- 24 *The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library Celebrate Seventy-Five Years*
Honoring Perrie Jones, the Librarian at the Center of It All
MARK TAYLOR
- 35 **Abbreviated Annual Report of the Ramsey County Historical Society**
- 39 **In Memoriam: Paul A. Verret**

Message from the Editorial Board

As always, the stories of our people make history. We are pleased to publish Leetta Douglas's profile of Nellie Griswold Francis, a Black suffragist and civil rights leader in Saint Paul during the early twentieth century. Francis and a group of determined women worked to advance the cause of women's right to vote with the Everywoman Suffrage Club in the Rondo neighborhood and later supported progressive causes nationally. This issue also features Ralph Goldstein's article on Sinclair Lewis's ties to Saint Paul, where he wrote parts of his novels, including *Main Street*, which was published one hundred years ago. And Mark Taylor presents the story of Perrie Jones, longtime city librarian, whose legacy includes establishing The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Finally, we note that we will miss Paul Verret, who acted as a wise steward of philanthropy. During his term as RCHS board chair and continuing on, Paul had unflagging faith in our mission and our ability to fulfill it.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Correction: Regrets to Campbell Casper, whose first and last names were reversed in the article "Public Archaeology: Unearthing the Past in Ramsey County and Beyond" in the Spring 2020 issue.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also 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. Thanks to the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, the Sinclair Lewis Society, and The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library for their financial support.

In Memoriam: Paul A. Verret

Prior to my year serving the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) as its interim executive director, I didn't have much contact with Paul Verret. That changed significantly between January 2012 and March 2013 when I was leading RCHS in the time before Chad Roberts, the Society's current president, was hired. During that transition, Paul was the chair of the Society's Board of Directors; thus he met with me regularly to discuss all manner of questions and problems related to both the day-to-day management of the organization and planning for its immediate future.

Today whenever I think about Paul, I recall a man who was a diligent historian and accomplished genealogist. From our initial meeting, he impressed me with his wide reading of history and all the time he'd spent researching his family roots in France and the United States. This surprised me because I knew that even though Paul was formally retired from the Saint Paul Foundation (today's Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation), he was very active on multiple nonprofit boards and other ventures that were supportive of our community. I always wondered where he found the time to be so diligent a historian whose depth of knowledge and understanding of both American and European history sprang primarily from what he'd read and the experiences he gained from his many trips abroad.

Paul was always motivated to support projects in Saint Paul that would build what he called "social capital." By that, Paul meant projects, whether civic, social, or historical, that involved people doing things together; getting things done. I saw this commitment firsthand during my time at RCHS and came to understand how important it is for the welfare of the wider community.

Another organization that grew and blossomed from Paul's commitment was The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, whose story we share in this issue. Paul believed in the forward-thinking vision of Perrie Jones, who started The Friends organization in 1945. He understood that Jones's hope for the library system and its community involved more than funding for staff development (although that contribution remains immeasurably important); he knew that a community that loved and valued its library would step up to support and grow with this treasured institution.

Through his commitment, determination, and love, Paul made Saint Paul and Ramsey County better through and through. Thank you, Paul. We are grateful.

John M. Lindley
RCHS Editor Emeritus (2006-2018)



Paul recognized the importance of building robust organizations. His support of RCHS over two decades reflects that focus—supporting planning, developing policy, and building a sustainable fundraising model for the Society are part of his legacy. He shared advice and invested a great deal of time with RCHS, and the organization is better for it. I loved that Paul didn't care if a project was exciting—he was willing to invest in whatever would do the most good. He'd be pleased to see RCHS complete the Red Barn transformation at Gibbs Farm, a project that will, like many things that Paul invested in, result in enhanced service to our community. I will miss his counsel and friendship."

—CHAD ROBERTS, PRESIDENT, RCHS

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society
adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and incorporating local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. The original programs at Gibbs Farm (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974) focused on telling the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways. RCHS built additional structures and dedicated outdoor spaces to tell the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved its library, archives, and administrative offices to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to allow greater access to the Society's collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a variety of public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. RCHS serves 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that introduce the Gibbs Family and the Dakota people of Heyate Otunwe. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Equity & Inclusion Statement

History informs us, inspires new choices, brings people together, and builds community. Likewise, it can be misused to inspire fear, create division, and perpetuate racism and other injustices. We resolve to present history in accordance with our values of Authenticity, Innovation, Inspiration, Integrity, and Respect. We believe that by doing so our community will be more informed, more engaged, and will become stronger.

R.C.H.S.
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