

## Column on Ramsey County Sesquicentennial celebration

### **Can you say "Sesquicentennial"? Ramsey County – Celebrating 150 years by Victoria Reinhardt**

Ramsey County was created by the territorial legislature on October 27, 1849 – 150 years ago this month. At the time it was created the northern boundary was north of Lake Mille Lacs and the southern boundary followed the Mississippi River to where it meets the Minnesota River. Other counties originally included in Ramsey County were all of Anoka, Isanti and Kanabec counties and part of Washington, Pine, Carlton, Aitkin, Mille Lacs and Hennepin counties. The size of Ramsey County has changed substantially over the years. It began as the largest county in the territory and today is the smallest county in the state at about 156 square miles.

In 1823 the first steamboat came to the region from St. Louis with supplies for Fort Snelling. By 1845 there were about 30 permanent families living in or near the burgeoning metropolis known as St. Paul. They were quite isolated until the next year when Henry Jackson established the first post office in Ramsey County. In the "trivia good to know at a Saints game" category, one of the earliest suppliers of liquor in the area was a Canadian named Pierre Parrant, nicknamed "Pig's Eye."

The history of Ramsey County government is an obvious interest of mine. The first recorded birth, death and marriage were all in 1839. They were not the same person, but odds are they all knew each other. The County Board Proceedings from the late 1890's and early 1900's were handwritten and were the responsibility of the County Auditor. A bidding and accounting system was in place by the late 1890's. The major concern of early Ramsey County Commissioners was roads and transportation.

St. Paul has always been the Ramsey County Seat. There have been three Court Houses in the last 150 years. The first Ramsey County Court House was built in 1851 and was located between Wabasha and Cedar and Fourth and Fifth Streets. In 1881 the second Court House, which resembled a castle, was built. The dedication of the current Court House took place on December 19, 1932. It is a stunning example of Depression era architecture. It is worth the trip downtown to tour the Memorial hall and see the Vision of Peace statue, which stands 36 feet tall and is carved from Mexican onyx.

1849 was an eventful year for Minnesota and for Ramsey County. Minnesota became a territory and Ramsey County was established. Henry Sibley lobbied the Federal government to allow the Minnesota territory to be formed and convinced the legislators to let St. Paul be its capitol. After Ramsey County was created, Governor Alexander Ramsey appointed county officers to hold office from October 27, 1849 to January 1, 1850. Good thing they did not make naming counties after governors a tradition or people would have to explain which "Anderson County" they lived in. The first election was held on November 26, 1849. We will be celebrating Ramsey County's sesquicentennial in many different ways.

150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Events:

- Ramsey County Historical Society – Bosse Photography exhibit at Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul.
- Ramsey County Celebrates 150 years – a historic exhibit, 8 to 5 weekdays in the lower level of the Court House, 15 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul.
- A weekend open house of the Court House will take place on October 23 and 24.
- A traveling history trunk may be reserved to help students visualize Ramsey County's past.
- "Trial of the Century" - The Honorable Judge Lawrence Cohen, presiding, is a mock trial in which Ramsey County will sue the State of Minnesota to regain the original land and tax base. The mock trial will take place on Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1:00 p.m., in Room 40A/B at the Court House.
- Historic Lectures – Historian Brian McMahon is leading a lecture series on a variety of subjects related to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. As part of this series I will be moderating a forum on Government and Politics at the Keller Lake Golf Club House in Maplewood on October 21 at 7:30 p.m. The Panelist will be Dean Barkley, State Planning Commissioner; George Latimer, former Mayor of St. Paul; and Russell Fridley, former Director of the Minnesota Historical Society.
- Great American History Theater - "*First Ladies of Ramsey County*" by Dana Marie Gillespie, through October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Box office: 651-292-4323.
- "The Ghosts of the Courthouse" – Free tours featuring prominent "characters" from the past will take place every half hour beginning at 7:00 p.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m. October 21 and 22 at the Court House. Reservations required: (651) 266-8023.

For more information on any of the planned events, please call (651) 266-8023.

Historical information sources: History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul, George E. Warner; *Ramsey County History*, Ramsey County Historical Society; and *Ramsey County Board Proceedings* and *Minnesota History Bulletin*, Minnesota Historical Society.

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