

Every Object Tells a Story

MARCIA G. ANDERSON WITH
COLLECTIONS AND SITES STAFF



Buckskin coat with quill embroidery, once owned by
Governor Alexander Ramsey

PICTURE YOU SEATED in a comfortable chair at home, reading. As you settle in, take a moment to reflect on the value of objects in your everyday life and in the telling of history. Look around and note the things that hold stories for you, that connect to your past and play a part in your life. Often, it is an object’s *story*—not its intrinsic value—that pushes you to display it or keep it always close. Objects link us to the past in a way that no other medium can. People may give away file drawers full of business or personal records, books, photographs, and other printed or written material mainly because the information can be duplicated or saved in a number of formats. But when asked to consider letting go of a chair used by their great-grandparents, it’s another story. That chair is a tangible object, and its owner can share an intimate experience with previous owners or users by sitting in it or simply resting a hand on the back rail.

The Minnesota Historical Society’s founders, concerned about preserving the history that they were making in the midnineteenth century, began collecting objects as soon as the institution was founded in 1849. At its annual meeting two years later, its president, Governor Alexander Ramsey, shared the vision:

A Historical Society in a land of yesterday! Such an announcement would indeed naturally excite at the first glance incredulity and wonder in the general mind. Well might it be exclaimed, “the country which has no past, can have no history”; with force could it be asked, “where are your records?” and if we even had them, it would not be surprising if it were still demanded, “what those records could possibly record?—what negotiations?—what legislation?—what progress in art or intellect could they possibly exhibit? Canst thou gather figs from thorns, or grapes from thistles?”¹

Those early acquisitions reflect their collectors’ and donors’ ideas of what was important in Minne-

sota's history and culture at the time and, as a result, relate stories of individuals from the majority culture—primarily men. Later generations of curators have widened their view of what's collectable, what's valuable, and what represents the broadest experiences of Minnesota's population. Newspaper accounts from the territorial period, photographs, census records, and personal letters and journals give us some insight. Nonetheless, many of the participants in this volatile period of Minnesota's history— itinerants moving through the territory, small business owners or manufacturers, Indians and other people of color, rural folk, women, children, and families—were under-recorded in their time and remain underdocumented. As a result, we continue to look for new, imaginative ways to recreate the stories of these people's lives.

THE SOCIETY'S MUSEUM collections include approximately 250,000 three-dimensional historical objects and nearly 1 million archaeological artifacts, with good representation of the fur-trade era, Indian culture, the Henry H. Sibley and Lac qui Parle sites, early entrepreneurial activity, and the precious family treasures brought here by territorial immigrants. Many of these things can provide a tangible connection to lesser-known people from that time.

Sometimes objects come to the museum without much information, and curatorial and conservation staff must serve as historical detectives. By analyzing elements such as the materials, manufacture, and use patterns and then tying together the facts available in other resources, we can often assemble the story of an object and its makers and users, placing them all in a broader historical context. Such is the case in the story below of Sarah A. Sibley's ermine muff and tippet.

Another story included here shows what three-dimensional objects can offer when other information is lacking. The quilt squares that friends gave to Hamilton and Sarah Jane Clark(e) when they left Pennsylvania in 1852 for their new home near Shakopee are the only record we have, at present, of these settlers. If they had been in a battle, we'd have dates, illustrations, or, perhaps, newspaper accounts. Because these simple pieces of hand-sewn and signed fabric were preserved, we can ask why the Clarks traded the life of a merchant's family for that of farmers, what they looked like, and why they never assembled a quilt from the squares. We know that community was important to them and their friends in Pennsylvania; clearly, they sought to retain that sense of belonging in their new home, as they and their descendants saved the squares for well over 100 years. Questions and deductions like these make us better historians.

Some of the objects preserved by the territorial movers and shakers and cared for by the early museum staff reflect an inherent flaw in documenting one's own culture: It's hard to be objective. We tend to acquire things of personal interest. As a result, history museums have many objects now referred to as relics and curios. In the early years, the Minnesota Historical Society's gifts included these 1856 donations from Samuel Whiting of Winona: "Leaf from the large Banian Tree in the East India Co.'s Garden, in Calcutta, 1853" and "A Rose Geranium Leaf, from the Grave of Napoleon I, at St. Helena, together with some poetry in reference to it." An unknown supporter donated "A leaf from the 'Old Charter Oak,' after the tree fell, August 21st, 1856." Many of these donations were lost when the capitol burned in 1881,

and most are no longer relevant to Minnesota history or to the kinds of stories that museums preserve and share or that historians will investigate today and in the future. Even so, some of these acquisitions do reflect what types of things excited people, informed political and personal decisions, or provided a place in the world context for those who were charting new territory for themselves and their families.

ON THE OTHER HAND, much of what early Minnesota Historical Society staff collected and documented *was* important and contributes significantly to our understanding of the past. For example, Mrs. Henry Jackson-Hinchley of Mankato donated St. Paul's first post office, a small, crudely made, nondescript pine box with 12 pigeonholes for sorting mail. It was used between 1842 and 1849 by her husband, Henry, who served as postmaster. And in 1890 a St. Paulite, Capt. Charles H. Beaulieu, donated a fire steel used by "Aysh-ke-bug-e-co-zhay (Flat Mouth) Head Chief of the 'Pillager' Chippewas." The documentation of these two pieces is substantial for the time period, although curators today would have asked more questions and sought photographs, journals, and direct quotes regarding usage, the users, and the makers.

One of the most significant objects in the Society's collections from the territorial period is a rare, quill-decorated leather coat once owned by Governor Ramsey. Dating to the mid-1800s, it is modeled on the western style of cloth coat worn by Europeans of the time. The Ojibwe, Cree, Eastern Sioux, and Red River métis made this type of garment, and similar ones are portrayed in illustrations of treaty signings and other significant events of the period.

Ramsey's granddaughters, Laura and Anita Furness, donated this coat

to the Society in 1943; unfortunately, records describe it only as a white buckskin scout coat (Sioux) and say nothing about how it was used, why it was saved, who made it, or where it was from. People have postulated that Ramsey bought it as a souvenir of his role in negotiating an Indian treaty, but it is just as likely that it was made and presented to him as a gift at a treaty signing or a similar occasion. Whatever its origins, curatorial and conservation staff were able to date the jacket by style and construction and can elaborate its story by determining how the skin was prepared, identifying the animal source of quills and the dye used to color them, and searching for more clues in illustrations and art of the period as well as in the voluminous records of Minnesota's first governor. Coats of this era, method of manufacture, and quality are exceedingly rare. Ramsey and his family knew that—and we can somewhat confidently assume that they preserved it because it has some tie to Minnesota history.

While many of the collections have been assembled primarily through donations, the Society has more recently taken an active role in searching out objects that illustrate the variety of the state and region. While it is unlikely that we will find significant items from the territorial period today, the last 25 years of diligent work have further shaped the already rich collections, adding depth and diversity.

As leading material-culture specialist Thomas J. Schlereth aptly wrote, “The artifacts made and used by a people are not only a basic expression of that people; they are, like culture itself, a necessary means of man’s self-fulfillment.”² The Minnesota Historical Society builds its collections to illustrate the broad and commonly shared themes of

the Minnesota story as well as aspects that diverge from prevailing ethnic, religious, political, or socioeconomic norms. We hope that the objects and their stories below bring each of you a meaningful encounter with the past, one that is relevant to your everyday lives and your personal reflections on history.

—*Marcia G. Anderson*

HUNTING RIFLE

The settlement of Minnesota’s frontier coincided with the nationwide transformation of gunsmithing from a craft to an industry. In the decades before the Civil War, the production of firearms by individual artisans resulted in unique weapons with stylistic trademarks representing a specific region. After 1860, large-scale manufacturing, aided by the distribution system of the railroads, began to displace independent craftsmen, and local characteristics in firearms slowly vanished.

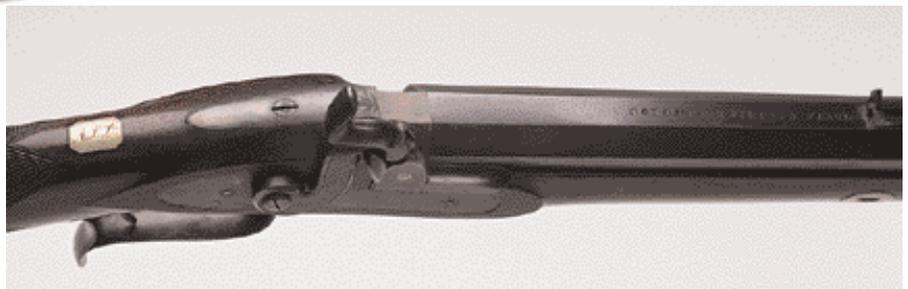
Most of the firearms used in Minnesota Territory were handmade products from other regions and countries including New England, France, Germany, and Sweden. Minnesota’s early gunsmiths were often transplanted from other countries

as well. William Golcher, born in England in 1834, emigrated to Philadelphia in 1840 with his father, a prominent gunsmith. Under his tutelage, Golcher mastered the art and by age 18 became foreman of his father’s shop. In 1855 Golcher moved west and opened his own establishment in St. Paul with associate James Simpson.

Golcher & Simpson produced firearms suited to the rigors of frontier life, including the half-stock plains rifle and the heavy double shotgun. The quality of the firm’s workmanship was renowned, and the partnership soon developed into one of the most prolific gun trades in the Northwest. Simpson left in 1863, but Golcher operated a business in St. Paul until 1878. He later moved to San Francisco, where he managed a gun shop until his death in 1886.

Golcher & Simpson crafted this muzzle-loading hunting rifle for St. Paul entrepreneur Auguste Louis Larpenteur in the late 1850s. A magnificent example of custom-made work from one of Minnesota’s pioneering gunsmiths, this .45-caliber weapon features platinum and silver fittings and a walnut stock adorned with the initials of its fortunate owner in nickel silver.

—*Adam Scher*





SLATE BOARD AND PENCILS

These slate pencils and the slate board fragment were discovered in 1940 during excavations of the Alexander G. Huggins house site at western Minnesota's Lac qui Parle mission. Huggins, according to historian Theodore C. Blegen in *Minnesota: A History of the State*, was a "lay teacher of farming" who traveled to Lac qui Parle with Dr. Thomas S. Williamson in 1835 to establish the mission for "Christianizing the Sioux." Richard R. Sackett conducted the excavations for the Works Projects Administration.

It is unusual to find 19 slate writing tools at one site. The large number suggests that school classes may have met in the residence. The slate board fragment has lines scored on one side to guide the writer and the word "Wapanton" (Wahpeton?) inscribed on the other in script. The Wahpeton division of the Dakota lived near Traverse des Sioux, Lac qui Parle, and Big Stone Lake. According to Helen Tanner's *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, Traverse des Sioux was an important river crossing. Lac qui Parle was probably the best-known "civilizing" experiment among the Dakota in the 1830s; missionaries there received the support of the influential trader Joseph Renville.

—Charles O. Diesen

MOCCASINS

In the years preceding 1849, most Dakota villages along the St. Peter's (Minnesota) and Mississippi Rivers contained a Christian mission school

sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. For missionaries, it was not an easy decision to accept an assignment in Indian territory. Writing from her parents' home in Quincy, Illinois, in February 1848, young Nancy Hunter comforted her betrothed, the Reverend John F. Aiton: "How could Providence speak more plainly . . . it seems to speak 'Labor for the Indian.' Their souls are precious." Hunter's fiancé wrote back in March from his Cincinnati seminary: "I have been anxiously revolving our going to the Sioux, in my mind. . . . My own physical courage is *very small*. Yet the Dr. [Thomas S. Williamson] thinks that *firmness* might supply its place; but I doubt it."

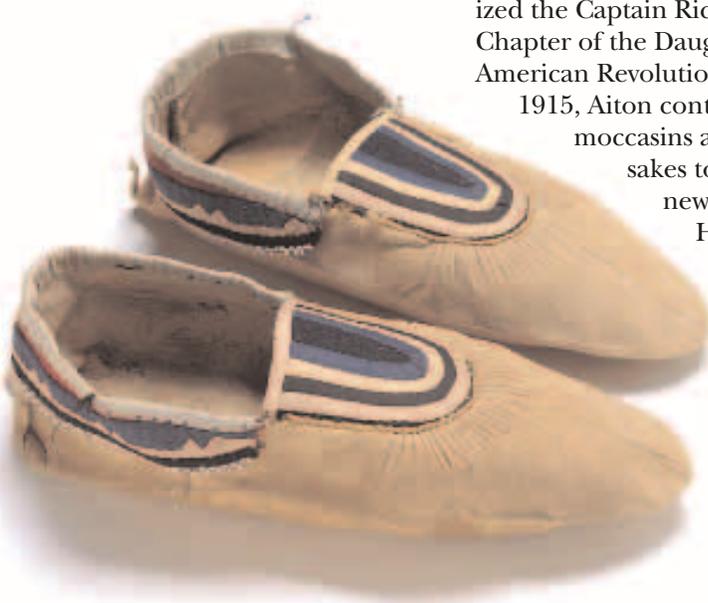
The Aitons finally decided to accept a mission assignment among the Dakota at Red Wing village. By

August 1848 the couple, with their modest belongings, had settled into the elm-bark village where they taught young Dakota women and men from Many Rattlesnakes' band. School ledgers show that the number of pupils varied greatly according to hunting and gathering cycles, and the Aitons occasionally served with the Williamsons at nearby Kaposia. Despite joys and fellowship, however, the trials and cultural alienation of frontier life were considerable, and after less than three years Nancy, having survived frequent bouts of homesickness and the deaths of two children, died of pulmonary consumption.

John Aiton remarried in 1855, this time to young Ohioan Mary Briggs, a missionary at Kaposia. From service there, the couple saved a pair of center-seam moccasins now in the Sibley Historic Site collection. The unworn moccasins have smoked-leather uppers, fine silk ribbonwork on the vamps and cuffs, and white seed-bead edging on the low cuffs.

The Aitons served the Dakota at Yellow Medicine and the Hazelwood Republic before settling on a farm near St. Peter. After her husband's death in 1892, Mary moved to Minneapolis, where in 1908 she organized the Captain Richard Somers Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. In 1912 and 1915, Aiton contributed the moccasins and other keepsakes to the DAR's newly opened Sibley House Museum.

—Lisa A. Krahn





MUFF AND TIPPET

An ermine muff and tippet, or cape, offer a real-world example of the physical and cultural distance traveled by furs in the Indian trade. Henry Sibley of the American Fur Company sent the furs to his youngest sister, Sarah Alexandrine (not to be confused with his wife Sarah Jane), and the 19-year-old had this fur ensemble created for an 1840 visit to Washington City (Washington, D.C.) with her father, Michigan supreme court justice Solomon Sibley.

Each pure-white ermine pelt used in the muff and tippet has a showy dark-tipped tail; this is the winter camouflage coat of the American least weasel. The many tiny skins required for Sarah's ensemble, probably captured one by one in Indian snares in the late winter of 1838–39, were scraped clean of flesh by Indian women. The excellent quality of the furs probably brought the hunter the maximum (although still small) value in trade goods that spring. The fur company shipped thousands of packs of animal furs to the Leipzig fur markets each summer, but Sibley most likely diverted these premium pelts directly to his sister.

Fashion drawings in *Godey's Lady's Book* for the late 1830s depict ermine winter outerwear accessories, including tippets, collars, cuffs, and muffs, and Sarah probably instructed a furrier to imitate these popular designs. The beautiful workmanship of an unknown Detroit or Washington City furrier can be seen in the watermelon-pink silk linings, hand-crocheted button closures, and careful decorative arrangement of the tails.

The result is a set of accessories that would be the envy of any fashion-conscious upper-class woman, east or west.

These unique objects were donated to the Sibley Historic Site collection in 1948 by Frances W. Sibley, who inherited them from her aunt, Sarah A., after her death in Detroit in 1918. The ermine ensemble has yellowed somewhat with age, but very few premium trade furs like these still exist, especially in such good condition and with such an evocative history.

—Lisa A. Krahn

SHIP'S WHEEL AND BELL

Christened in Washington, D.C., in 1855 with water from the Minnesota River, the *U.S.S. Minnesota* was among the last of the great wooden warships. One of the largest in the U.S. Navy when constructed, the *Minnesota* was a 285-foot, 3,200-ton, steam-driven frigate armed with 40 guns. Its first tour of duty took it to Asia as part of the East India Squadron from 1857 to 1859. With the outbreak of the Civil War, it became the flagship of the Atlantic blockade flotilla that in June 1861 captured the first Confederate warship, the *Savannah*.

Less than a year later the *Minnesota* witnessed the first encounter between armored ships in a battle that would revolutionize naval warfare. On March 8, 1862, it was serving near Hampton Roads, Virginia, when it was attacked by the *C.S.S. Virginia* (formerly the *Merrimac*), an armored Confederate vessel. The *Virginia's* opening rounds damaged the *Minnesota's* main mast, and afterwards it ran aground. It was spared a second attack because the *Virginia* drew too much water to advance within firing range. Nightfall halted the engagement, and in the morning the U.S. Navy's ironclad *Monitor* arrived to battle the *Virginia*. The two fired dozens of shots into each other without measurable effect, demonstrating that wooden vessels like the *Minnesota* would never be able to contend successfully with armored ships. Witnessing this first battle between ironclads, *Minnesota* commander Colonel Gideon J. Van Brunt wrote: "Never before was anything like it dreamed of by the great-



est enthusiast in maritime warfare.” However, by the end of the nineteenth century, armored vessels would comprise most of the world’s modern navies.

The *Minnesota* was withdrawn from active service in 1865, and for the next 35 years it served as a training vessel. In 1901 Cass Gilbert, architect of the Minnesota capitol building, persuaded state commissioners to petition the federal government to donate an artifact from the ship for display. Three years later Congress authorized the donation of the steering wheel and bell to the Minnesota Historical Society. Measuring about five feet in diameter, the double wooden wheel required two helmsmen to operate. As many as six sailors might be needed to man it in bad weather. The cast brass bell, which is 30 inches in diameter and weighs about 300 pounds, bears the *Minnesota’s* name, the initials of the Washington navy yard where the ship was built, and the year the bell was dedicated, 1856.

—Adam Scher

COTTON DRESS

This paisley-printed, sheer cotton summer dress was worn by a young woman, probably for her wedding or the social activities preceding it. *Godey’s Lady’s Book* for April 1855 describes fashionable, flounced dresses and confirms what this particular garment tells us about Lavinia Tarr, for whom it was probably made: “A handsome flounced dress is always more expensive than one with a plain skirt, and ladies of ample fortune are apt to give a preference to what only a limited number can afford to wear.”

Tarr married John Freeman Norrish, both of Devonshire, England, in May 1858. Immediately afterward they sailed for the United States,



where Norrish had recently become a partner in the J. L. Thorne and Co. dry goods business in the up-and-coming town of Hastings, Minnesota. Lavinia may or may not have been a lady of “ample fortune,” but she certainly had ready access to fashionable English dress goods from her husband’s store.

Though little information survives about Lavinia, records show that John Norrish was a well-known businessman and public official during the 40 years he lived in Hastings. Born in 1828, he emigrated to America in 1852 and found his way to Hastings by 1857. There he not only stocked a “superior line” of dress goods, but he became a member of the state legislature in 1876 and 1881, director of the state prison, and director of the state agricultural society. He easily fits the profile of a man who could provide for a lady used to dressing in the height of fashion.

What we know of Lavinia is limited to her 1835 birth date, her 1858 marriage date, her five daughters’ birth dates, recorded in census records, and the death dates of three infants, found in *Hastings Gazette* obituaries. We can guess, though, that as the wife of a prominent citizen and a resident of the only octagon house in Hastings, she must have indeed been a fashionable woman.

The muslin day dress with its flounces, paisley print, and tiny-waisted full skirt was donated by the couple’s daughter in 1941.

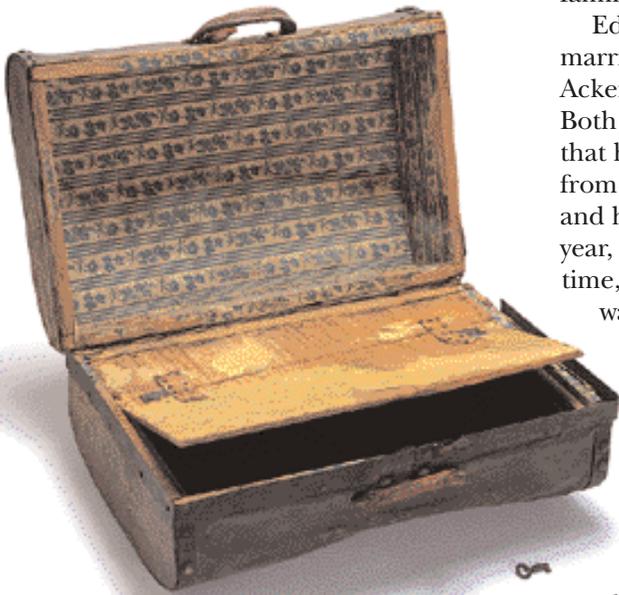
—Linda McShannock

SATCHEL

Family legend has it that Samuel Ashley Higbee carried everything he needed for his new life in Minnesota Territory in this handmade wooden satchel. The inscription inside it reads: “Uncle Ashley’s satchel. He carried this on a stick over his shoulder when he came from Bloomfield, Wisconsin to Minnesota. He walked the whole distance. . . . when they came in 1858 and bought land—the old Grannis farm at Vernon Center.”

Higbee had moved first from Claremont, New Hampshire, to Wisconsin with his sister and brother-in-law, Caroline and Samuel Rice Grannis. Sometime during 1858, the year of Minnesota’s statehood, Higbee set out for this small Blue Earth County settlement in search of unbroken sod. Higbee’s sister and brother-in-law followed in 1859, and his 21-year-old nephew and namesake, Samuel Higbee Grannis, arrived in 1860.

A shoemaker by trade, Higbee probably made this satchel himself. Constructed of wood, reinforced with metal straps, and covered with oil-impregnated cloth sometimes called leatherette, the crude satchel



could hold scarcely a change of clothing.

In 1960 Samuel Grannis's daughter Edith donated the satchel to the Minnesota Historical Society. The family's saga is recounted in a 1962 book in her father's own words. *New Hampshire to Minnesota: Memoirs of Samuel Higbee Grannis (1839—1933)*, in the MHS library, is unique in its details yet similar to the stories told by thousands of families who arrived in Minnesota from the East during the territorial period.

—Kendra Dillard

TIFFANY CUP

In marked contrast to the handmade satchel brought to the territory, this fancy silver cup made by New York's prestigious Tiffany and Company also found a home in early Minnesota. While we know little about how the cup—engraved with the name “Mattie” in old English letters—arrived in the territory, we can speculate based on what we know about the family that owned it.

Edmund Rice met and married Anna Maria “Mattie” Acker in Kalamazoo in 1848. Both were members of families that had migrated to Michigan from the East, she from New York and he from Vermont. The next year, like other young couples at the time, they headed west where land was cheap and opportunities seemed promising.³

In a 1953 reminiscence, their daughter Maria wrote that the family had lived in a log cabin on Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) in St. Paul until their home on Trout Brook, a small creek running into the Mississippi River northeast of the city, was built in 1862. Trout Brook was the homestead of the Rice family and their 11 children until the land was vacated in 1882 for the Northern Pacific Railway.

Edmund Rice operated a law office in St. Paul until 1855. Two years later he became president of the Minnesota and Pacific Railroad and its successors, which built Minnesota's first rail line, from St. Paul to St. Anthony, in 1862. His circumstances had improved enough for him to purchase a 45-acre tract at a cost of almost \$9.00 per acre and to build an eight-bedroom, three-bath house complete with marble fire-

places brought from the East and a separate dining room for the family's servants.⁴

The lovely sterling-silver Tiffany cup dates to 1853–54, based on the mark on the bottom. At some time in the 1850s, Rice's fortunes on the rise, he might have given the cup to his wife as a present. As prestigious then as it is today, Tiffany made heavier gauge wares with a higher percentage of silver than most of its competitors. Decorated



in the raised-relief repousse style, the cup is richly patterned by hand hammering from the inside. Also distinctive is Tiffany's “butler” finish, which resembles the finish achieved after years of hand polishing.

—Kendra Dillard

WOMAN'S WORKTABLE

“We remember, with all allowable pride, that the first payment on the lumber for the first schoolhouse [in St. Paul] was made with money earned with the needle by the ladies [sewing society],” wrote schoolteacher Harriet E. Bishop in her reminiscence of territorial Minnesota. For the early and mid-nineteenth century woman, sewing was at once part of her household duties and a means of artistic expression. Some historians contend that needlework was also political: “Women used their sewing and quilting skills to assert their agency in the world outside the home, to claim and secure for themselves more public and political space.”⁵



and tools, the worktable may have been the first piece of fine furniture designed specifically for females. Some tables doubled as small desks, including compartments for writing instruments and baize-covered writing surfaces.

Bishop's worktable, which dates from about 1850, is typical. The box is veneered mahogany, and the hinged lid opens to reveal a shallow well lined with birds-eye maple and originally partitioned to hold sewing tools and implements. The mirror inside the lid was probably used to increase the amount of reflected candle or gas light. Most worktables also featured a pleated-fabric storage bag hanging beneath the box, but Bishop's has a veneered semi-cylindrical drawer instead.

A label haphazardly stamped numerous times inside the lid and drawer reads "P. Schreiber/Manufacturer and Designer/in Furniture and Bedding/Broadway [*illegible*]." It may have indicated where the piece was made. Did the worktable accompany Bishop on her riverboat journey to St. Paul in 1847? Or was it a gift from her new-found Minnesota friends? Whatever the

circumstances, there is no doubt that this worktable symbolizes the vital place that needlework held not only in Bishop's public and private lives but in those of many nineteenth-century women.

—Patty Dean

DRAGOON'S JACKET AND CAP

As Minnesota moved toward becoming a territory, a young soldier rode through Mexico City with General Winfield Scott's victorious American army. James Bell was escorting his celebrated commander on the route to Veracruz when a fall with his horse put him in the hospital. Soon mustered out of the army, Bell moved to the wilds of Wisconsin and Minnesota Territory, working as a riverboat pilot, among other jobs. Years later, his family donated the cap and jacket, pocket pistol, and playing cards used in the Mexican War to the Minnesota Historical Society. Private Bell hardly could conceive that his familiar old uniform would one day be unique.

The Second Regiment of U.S. Dragoons, Bell's outfit, had been organized for the Florida campaign of 1836, fighting the Seminole Indians there until 1842. Deployed west, most of the regiment later joined General Scott's Mexico City campaign in 1847. After participating in the Battle of Cerro Gordo and the assaults on Mexico City, the Second Dragoons remained on duty in the country as part of the hard-pressed U.S. Army of Occupation.

Enlisted men such as James Bell received one

Such seems to be the case with Bishop, who called the activities of the Circle of Industry, as the city's early ladies' sewing society was formally known, a vehicle of "rational, social pleasure" that would "elevate the moral tone of society."⁶ Bishop was also the founding secretary-treasurer for the sewing society of the First Baptist Church. It is fitting that one of the few tangible reminders of her life is her worktable, donated to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1937 by Harriet Merrill Clifton of Evanston, Illinois.

The worktable as a piece of furniture, introduced by English designer Thomas Sheraton in his *Drawing-Book* (1791–94), quickly became popular in America. Usually made of mahogany and providing storage for needlework



woolen winter-service uniform jacket per year, along with a similar but untrimmed cotton drilling jacket, issued seasonally. Uniforms were normally made or inspected at Schuylkill Arsenal outside Philadelphia.

Bell's jacket, however, falls far below usual government standards. External edges at the front center and bottom are unfinished, with body and facing pieces simply laid together and coarsely stitched. The cream-colored domet flannel lining is crudely whipped together. Facings are roughly cut and unevenly attached. The external pocket flaps are false, and the narrow yellow worsted binding is sewn with wide running and felling stitches indiscriminately.

The dates of Bell's service in Mexico may explain the jacket's poor quality. In fall 1847 the acting quartermaster general of Scott's army had set up an extensive system in Mexico City to manufacture uniforms. Not until the next year, after Bell's discharge, were better-quality Philadelphia-made uniforms available.

This forage cap is the only known example with its original colored branch-band intact. Adopted in 1839, this style proved popular, at least compared to the leather forage cap it replaced. The folding cloth cape of Bell's cap was carefully cut off, and the lining and padding, chin strap, and original side buttons are no longer present. The Second Dragoons sometimes removed their caps' padding to create a more rakish appearance.

The decorative yellow band of 1½-inch worsted tape, crudely basted to the top and bottom of the cap band, clearly shows the shadow of and hole from the attachment loop of the now-missing company letter "G." Use of the colored band is well documented in paintings of troops serving in Mexico.

Bell's uniform offers a rare look

at the actual clothing worn by a member of the flamboyant Second Dragoons. Important to military historians, the uniform contrasts significantly with the never issued, regular-army garments of the Mexican War period in the National Museum of American History.

—*Stephen E. Osman*

QUILT BLOCKS

Friendship quilts with names of family and friends cross-stitched or written in ink on the center blocks of each square were popular parting gifts to families moving west. These quilts were most popular during the 1840s and 1850s, a time of great sentimentality, when many families moved to land newly opened to settlement.

The autograph-cross or album-block pattern was a favorite choice for friendship quilts. This set of autographed quilt blocks contains signatures by Pennsylvania relatives and friends of the Hamilton Clark(e) family, which left the community in 1852 for Minnesota Territory. The blocks are signed in ink, and some include dates and place names. Each of the 37 squares is made of a different cotton print, the variety of colors and designs available in the 1850s reflecting the increased output of New England textile mills. These one- and two-color, small-patterned prints were used for children's clothing and women's everyday dresses.

Hamilton, his wife, Sarah Jane, and their six children settled in Eagle Creek Township in Scott County, where Hamilton became



a farmer. The unassembled quilt blocks remained in the family until donated to MHS by a great-granddaughter in 1986.

—*Linda McShannock*

CARIOLE

"During the winter of 1851–52 I proceeded to England, having travelled in snow shoes from Athabasca to St. Paul's, a distance of 1,730 statute miles. Being aided by dogs for the last four hundred and fifty miles, which . . . were accomplished in ten days." So wrote Dr. John Rae, noted explorer associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, to an unknown recipient in February 1856. Rae arrived in St. Paul on February 14, 1852, having traversed the territory from Pembina by dog team. He was on his way back to England from the Arctic Ocean, where he had searched

in vain for the ill-fated exploring party of Sir John Franklin.⁷

The mode of travel that Rae referred to in his letter was dog-sleighting or dog-sledging, a familiar and necessary form of transportation during Minnesota's snowy winters. The route between St. Paul and Pembina, where the population rivaled that of St. Paul and St. Anthony, had no stage line until 1859. Carioles, or one-person, flat-bottomed sleds, often were the only alternative to travel on snowshoes. Resembling an enclosed toboggan, these dog-drawn vehicles probably originated among Indian people.⁸

Whether or not the Minnesota Historical Society's cariole is indeed the one that carried Dr. Rae to St. Paul in 1852 is speculative. The 9-foot wood-and-hide "Red River train" presented to the historical society by William Gates Le Duc in November 1855 could be Rae's sled. It was in that year that the organization gained a "hall set apart in the Capitol . . . properly furnished with shelves for the reception of books

and other documents," perhaps explaining an apparent delay in donating the sled. This seems to be corroborated by J. Fletcher Williams in his 1876 *History of the City of Saint Paul*, where he noted, "The 'dog-sledge' used by Dr. Rae, in his long journey over the snow, was presented by him to the Historical Society, as a memento, and may still be seen at their rooms."

While we may never know definitively, but this cariole still evokes rugged days long past.

—Kendra Dillard

NOTES

¹ Alexander Ramsey, "Our Field of Historical Research," in *Minnesota Historical Society Collections* 1 (St. Paul, 1872): 43–44.

² Thomas J. Schlereth, comp. and ed., *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 164.

³ Maria Rice Dawson, manuscript,

Christmas 1953, Edmund Rice and Family Papers, MHS.

⁴ Maria Rice Dawson, "A Letter to My Grand Children About My Childhood Home, 'Trout Brook,'" typescript, 1953, Rice papers.

⁵ Elaine Hedges, Pat Ferrero, and Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: Women, Quilts, and American Society* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1996), quoted in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Winter 1988, p. 226.

⁶ Bishop, *Floral Home, or First Years of Minnesota* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co., 1857), 101.

⁷ John Rae, *John Rae's Correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company on Arctic Exploration, 1844–55* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1953), xcv, xcvi, quoted in Curtis L. Roy to Alan Woolworth, Feb. 24, 1982, museum collections accession file 1981.11.25, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; *The Minnesotian* (St. Paul), Feb. 21, 1852.

⁸ Here and below, J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul to 1875* (1876; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983), 322; *Proceedings of the Minnesota Historical Society, from Its Organization, Nov. 15, 1849, to the Admission of the State, May 11, 1858* (St. Paul: Ramaley and Cunningham, 1878), 12.





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