



In Plain Sight Fillmore County



I LOVE AMATEUR snapshot collections because they may contain surprises. Whether found in albums or drawers, containing few or many photos, the best collections show us a unique view of life.

Snapshots by Gilbert B. Ellestad of Lanesboro let us glimpse average small-town folk from 100 years ago. After purchasing his first camera in 1900, Ellestad began recording the merchants and workers in his little Fillmore County town of 1,102 people. He photographed the important and the humble as they appeared on

the streets near his jewelry store on E Street: the doctor, the traveling salesman, the telephone lineman, the housekeeper, the market gardener, and the general storekeeper were among his subjects. Most amateurs in this early era of snapshot cameras took views of their own homes, yards, and immediate families. Sometimes they photographed the streets near their homes, and a few documented Main Street. But few took the time to record their fellow citizens and create a town gallery of who was who.

In this portrait from 1905, Ellestad presents one of the town's saloonkeepers relaxing outside the Merchants Hotel while smoking and reading the *Lanesboro Leader*. The two-story brick hotel is where this

fellow lives, just around the corner from Ellestad's store. Four saloons are within a block of the bench upon which he sits, nattily dressed in a white shirt, tie, suspenders, and snappy bowler hat. When it's time for work, he has only a short walk to his thirsty customers.

When photos break out of photographic conventions, we realize how much is missing from the visual record. What typical but undocumented scenes should we photograph from our own lives today?

—BONNIE G. WILSON

Bonnie Wilson, author of Minnesota in the Mail, was curator of photography at MHS from 1972 to 2005.

Frederick Spangenberg House St. Paul, Ramsey County



IN 1864 ABRAHAM LINCOLN was reelected president, General Sherman's army marched on Atlanta, and oxen began hauling yellow limestone over the snow to the site of the Frederick Spangenberg house, one of St. Paul's oldest extant stone farmhouses. When it was under construction, Spangenberg and his wife, Anna, lived in a log cabin on one end of the property, near where Jefferson and Cretin avenues intersect today.

Frederick Spangenberg was a German immigrant who built a prosperous dairy farm and milk-distribution business. He also designed his house. When completed in 1867, it was surrounded by an 80-acre dairy farm, well outside the St. Paul city limits. Today, the house is surrounded not by fields and barns but by the paved streets and ample houses of the Highland Park neighborhood. Sited on a wooded lot, the house at 375 Mount Curve Boulevard—a two-story Greek Revival with two-foot-thick, random coursed walls—is somewhat obscured from the street by tall hedges. A one-story appendage originally served as a kitchen but was converted into a sitting room in 1932 by two of the Spangenberg sons, who lived in the house after their parents' deaths. The sons also transformed the first-floor bedroom into a kitchen, the parlor into a dining room, and one of the four upstairs bedrooms into a bathroom.



MHS COLLECTIONS

In 1954 the Spangenbergs' youngest granddaughter, Mrs. Gertrude M. Yates, and her husband moved in and updated the interior while preserving its historic integrity. Then almost a century old, the house still contained a wine cellar complete with wooden casks and press, paddles and crocks for butter and cheese making, and a cabbage cutter used for large-scale production of sauerkraut—a source of vitamins in the winter. The Yates family lived in the house until 1972, marking the end of the Spangenberg era. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

—LAURA WEBER

Laura Weber, an independent writer and historian living in Minneapolis, is a board member of the Minnesota chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians and communications director of the General College at the University of Minnesota.

Sources: "Spangenberg, Frederick House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1975, State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society; Kathryn Boardman, "Farmhouse in a City Setting," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Sept. 11, 1955, *Roto Magazine*, p. 7; Gareth Hiebert, "Old Spangenberg Place," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 15, 1974, p. 12.



Spangenberg House, about 1910 and (above) 1970



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).