



1893

DEWEY-RADKE HOUSE

PINE GROVE PARK
LITTLE FALLS, MINN.

THE DEWEY-RADKE HOME

The home, now known as the Dewey-Radke home, was built in 1893 by three brothers, Ellick N. Botton, Lewis N. Botton, wife Esther, and Sever N. Botton, wife Lizzie. The house was beyond their financial means to complete. It was later owned by several people for short periods of time. William F. Gibson, 1897, then Rebecca A. McCausy, and for a short period to Dr. L. M. Roberts and E. F. Shaw.

The Thomas Dewey family purchased the home in 1907 and lived there with their five children until 1920. Samuel Hammerbeck owned the house for a short time and then sold it to F. W. Radke in 1922.

In May of 1974 the heirs of the Radke family sold the home, with the house and barn on the property, to the City of Little Falls for a nominal sum.

Their father had passed away in April, 1964, and the mother lived alone in the home until 1974, when she died suddenly and alone at home. Feeling that the property should continue as a part of the Pine Grove Park, and hoping that the house would be saved for historic reasons and the enjoyment of the public, the house was offered to the City for purchase.

After a favorable evaluation by State Historical Society personnel, the restoration of the home was begun. No major repairs were needed inside the home, so redecorating was the primary object. A new roof was added and the trim outside was painted. In the near future, it is hoped that the wrap-around porch on the front and west of the house will be replaced. A search for proper furnishings is now underway. Several donations have been received from interested persons. The late Frank Dewey, and wife Alice, designated part of their estate to be used for the restoration of the home.

Contact with Mrs. George Peterson, the former Beatrice Dewey, and the last living of the children of Thomas Dewey and his wife, was made in October of 1976. Mrs. Peterson visited the home and the interview was written by Anne Merrick, former Transcript columnist, and published with her picture.

"She had not set foot in the old house for 50 years, yet there were memories in every corner—from the kitchen where her mother had baked pies on the wood stove, to the tower, high above the attic, where she and her sisters and brothers used to play.

"The visitor was Mrs. George Peterson (Beatrice Dewey), a stately lady of 86, who had come up on the bus from Minneapolis last Sunday to pay a visit to the old Dewey home—more recently the Radke home, next to Pine Grove Park. She walked through the rooms with Mrs. Leslie Werner and Mrs. Joseph Girtz, admiring the new wallpaper throughout, the start of refurnishing, the lace curtains at the windows. Of special interest to her was an excellent photograph of the house as it had been when she was a teenager, and joined other family members in posing in front of it. There were her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dewey; sisters Mildred and Dessie, and brothers Frank and Earl . . ."

The wills of the late Frank and Alice Dewey designated that a considerable sum of money go to the City, generally for park purposes, but also for the restoration of the former Dewey home. The house was already city property—although it was bought, one must admit, mainly for the adjoining barn, which is used for winter housing of some of the small park animals, and for storage.

Mrs. Peterson recalled, as she walked through the once familiar rooms, that there had been one of the big old coal-burning stoves in the living room, which probably supplied most of the heat, also, to the upstairs bedrooms. Sliding doors to the "parlor" were usually kept closed, since that room was for special occasions or "company." Upstairs, she pointed out the front bedroom, used by her parents, the east room where she and Dessie slept, a back bedroom for the boys, and one on the west for Mildred. They were cold rooms, as was the case in many old homes—her mother had many woolen quilts, for the beds, and bedspreads were of heavy cotton, she said. When the Deweys lived there, there was outdoor plumbing—a bathroom later added by the Radkes.

A pump, at an old-fashioned sink in the kitchen, is part of the restoration project, but Beatrice told her guides that there had indeed been a pump just there in the days when the house was her home—also a big woodbox, which Earl was expected to fill each morning. Radkes had added other improvements—running water in the kitchen, and a furnace. A handsome front staircase, and a much-used back stairs were part of the original house.

"Just imagine going back, when one is more than 85 years old, to a long-ago residence which had not been visited for over 50 years. Mrs. Peterson found many memories welling as she walked through the rooms—even climbed the spiral staircase to that tower room with its wide view of Little Falls. She pointed out the place in the living room where her father's roll-top desk had stood—the spot in the yard where he used to bury a big bean-pot in a nest of hot coals to produce inimitable baked beans. In that special parlor she had been married, in 1910, to George Peterson, who was to prosper in the feed business and serve for several terms on the city council. Frank Dewey was his business partner and successor in the business.

"Perhaps visitors, in the future, will find the old house quaint and even a bit queer—but it is by saving these visual evidences of the past the newer generations may be shown how life used to be—just as happy a life even though the Deweys did not at first have electric lights, and certainly never had the many luxuries which today are taken for granted. When the time is right, it is to be hoped that many who visit Pine Grove Park will take a few minutes extra to walk through the Dewey-Radke home, for a look at the past."

In February, 1977, Agatha Radke Berendt, oldest of the Radke children, wrote pages of memories she has of the years the family lived in the home.

Following are parts of her writings.

The home was not modern when they moved in, but had a cistern pump, and electricity. It was one of the first homes in the city to have electricity, put in by the Dewey owners.

The Radke children attended grade school at the west side Lincoln school, seventh and eighth grade at Washington school (both now torn down) and high school at the original building on First Street Northeast. In those days children walked to school, as no transportation was provided.

The wrap-around porch was on the house when they moved in but was torn off in 1923 and the two small porches built. The inside of the house is just as it was when they bought it, with no rooms altered.

When the house was made modern, a small bedroom upstairs was made into a bathroom and a half-bath was put in a corner of the downstairs bedroom.

Morning and evening the children took turns in taking the cow to pasture north of the park across the tracks. On the way they found wild flowers, such as bloodroot, May flowers, and many others in abundance. They enjoyed the daily walks through the tall, cool whispering pines. They saw the leaves changing from spring to fall, and knew where every bending birch and stately pine was located.

In the spring of 1924, Mr. Radke was appointed caretaker and overseer of Pine Grove Park. This job he held for 26 years.

Toward evening on May 22, 1925, a freak tornado came. The family went to the basement for protection and while there could hear hard, crashing sounds. Two large pine trees were uprooted, and a third one broken off 25 feet above the ground. All three landed between the house and barn from the west of the house, not breaking so much as a shingle from either building.

The heating system in the house was a big, old-fashioned stove with coiled water pipes inside. This system heated both the downstairs and upstairs. The stove was located in the northwest corner of the living room (center room). Wood was the only fuel used.

In the kitchen was an old-fashioned cook stove, with reservoir for hot water for dishes and bathing. Agatha carried lots of wood in and ashes out.

During the early years when Mr. Radke was park caretaker, J. M. Totten was area game warden. He sometimes brought orphaned fawns to the park to be cared for. That meant bottle feeding at least four times a day. Luckily they had a cow to supply the milk for feeding. Several times the family was saddened by dogs getting into the deer pasture and killing some of the tame deer.

In November, 1924, Irene was born. In May, 1929, Vernon was born. Both were happy occasions for the family. In July, 1934, the family was greatly saddened by the drowning death of older brother Leonard.

The family butchered beef and hogs and had no freezer, of course, so canned the meat, and made summer sausage. There is a bean hole west of the house, which was used for smoking sausages and sulphuring apples, as well as baking beans. It is still there.

In early fall of 1937, the old garage and barn were torn down. In October, 1937, the present barn was built, including the wood shed and garage.

Finally, in about 1938, a great day came when the city ran sewer lines to the property. At last the kitchen sink and basement had drains. The greatest day came when city water was brought to the property in spring of 1941. A new kitchen sink was put in and the upstairs bathroom and downstairs half-bath were completed. It was not until 1950 that the old heating system was taken out, with all the old pipes and radiators. A new forced air furnace was installed then. At the same time the kitchen cook stove was replaced with a new electric range.

The fireplace was sealed up when the furnace was installed and recently has been opened. Bricks used in replacing the fireplace are from the old Congregational church, recently torn down. The new mantel is from a large pine tree from the Park.

"Many times as I sit and think about our wonderful home there among those giant tall whispering pines, it seems like a dream. But then again, like only yesterday, when my brothers and I kept checking for any changes in the park.

"Our father passed away in 1964 after living in that same house for 42 years. Our mother lived there by herself for more than ten years."²

The family contributed greatly to the Pine Grove Park preservation and to the subsequent enjoyment of countless people for many years.

It is therefore fitting and proper that this property within the park be kept and maintained for the esthetic enjoyment and educational purposes it can provide for visitors, young and old, from near and far.

Let us take pride in preserving the old and lovely things from another era, to be appreciated by present and future generations.

Credits—

Cover Design: Mrs. Joe Girtz

Copy: Mrs. Leslie Werner

Sources: ¹Anne Merick's "The Last Word"

²Mrs. Agatha Radke Berendt

BOTTON FAMILY HISTORY

Like the many thousands who left their homes in Europe to seek a new life of freedom and opportunity in the new world, so too did the men who were responsible for the origin of this fine home. They came to build their own future and they came to help build a new country. If they lacked knowledge and financing, they had an abundance of courage, ambition and integrity.

Nels E. Botton, born in 1821, was the eldest son in a family that had owned and operated a farm near the city of Bergen, Norway. In 1867, he left Norway bringing with him his wife, three sons and one daughter. According to naturalization records they landed at the Port of Milwaukee. No information as to the whereabouts of the family during the next five years is available. It is known that they lived in Wisconsin, probably in or near the town of Rio, but certainly in the community of Rising Sun. The mother died and is buried in that area. The remaining members of the family: the father, Nels E.; the three sons, Ellick, Sever and Lewis; and the daughter, Malla, moved to Little Falls in 1885, where they established their home at First Avenue Southwest and Third Street Southwest, according to a city directory published at that time. Forming a business partnership, the three brothers operated a General Merchandise and Drug business on Lots 7 and 8 of Block 64 of Thayer's Addition, purchased from Donat Trettel in September, 1891.

The land on which this house stands was purchased by Botton Brothers on January 2, 1893, from Nehemiah and Caroline Clarke for the purpose of building a family home. Business was good and the family had begun to grow with the addition of a wife for Ellick. Prospects were bright. While the house was being built, the economy of the area began to decline as the huge lumbering industry which had supplied most of the employment was phased out and moved to western states. As was suggested in the Daily Transcript column by Anne Merrick in October of 1976 and confirmed 50 years earlier by the widow of Lewis N. Botton, the burden of "the brick house out in the country" proved just too much for a small business struggling to stay alive. By the end of 1895, the family dream house was lost and with it the business of Botton Brothers, General Merchandising and Drugs, "Scandinavian Spoken."

Following the Little Falls experience, the Botton family, which had grown with the marriage of Lewis to Esther Regnell, moved on to North Dakota. The partnership established new businesses in the cities of Northwood and Hatton which were very successful until June, 1899, when a disastrous fire wiped out two business blocks in Northwood, including Botton Brothers, General Merchandise and Drugs. That event brought an end to the partnership. However, the close family association continued. The family moved on to western North Dakota, where good farm land was available to homesteaders. The brothers and their wives filed claims on a quarter section each in Richland township of Ward County in the fall of 1899 and by the following summer had built new homes. After fulfilling the requirements of the Homestead Act the brothers went their separate ways. Ellick to Williston to go into the clothing business; Sever, who never married, to Edmore where he again engaged in the drug business, while Lewis remained to manage and operate the farm land. In 1902, he opened a general merchandise business in the new town of Flaxton while continuing to manage the farm. By 1907, he built a new home in Flaxton, almost identical to this house, except that it was not of brick. Lewis N. Botton died in 1912 leaving his widow and four sons, ranging in age from 15 to 3 years. All but the youngest, David of Phoenix, Arizona, have died. Little is known of Ellick's family except that there were at least two sons and probably more. It is not known whether any survive.

In 1890, Erick and Christine Regnell, who had lived in Falun, Sweden, brought their two daughters, Erika and Esther, to Minnesota to join their son, Charles, who had preceded them in 1888. They established a home north of Little Falls in the small community of Darling. Esther, the youngest daughter, who met her future husband while she was employed as a nursemaid at the Lindbergh home in Little Falls, married Lewis N. Botton at Randall in June, 1895. The Regnell family continued to live in the Darling area until about 1910 when they too moved to western North Dakota. Many of their relatives still live in the Little Falls, Darling and Randall area.

While later owners had a greater part in the history of this fine old home, none of it would have been possible without the dreams and aspirations of three young men from Norway, the Botton Brothers.