

## MISSION STATEMENT

Preserving the past for future generations by collecting a unique and enduring collection of Polk County history shared with the public through programs, exhibits and research.

## MUSEUM HOURS

2022 Season: 5/26 - 9/5  
Thursday - Sunday: Noon to 4 p.m.  
Open on Memorial Day and Labor Day.


## ADMISSION


No fee for admission.  
Donations appreciated.


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- **Handicap accessible.**
- **Elevator for all three floors.**
- **Air conditioned.**

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## Successful Pioneer School 2022

"Our Pioneer School was a huge success this year, led by our teacher Mrs. Henderson". At the end of their 3 day session, the students enjoyed a tour of the Polk County Museum, and good ole fashioned root beer floats."

*Check out photos from this year's Pioneer School on pages 4 & 5.*



Silverbrook mansion on the St. Croix River, Osceola, Wisconsin, 1940

## Silverbrook and the St. Croix Valley Country Club

Written by Haley Prochnow

I first hiked the Silverbrook trail in Interstate Park on Labor Day 2021. Before my visit, I read about the remnants of a defunct prospector's mansion on the river bluff along the trail in "St. Croix Tales and Trails" by Rosemarie Vezina Braatz. I was in search of an adventure, the ruins, and the waterfall at the end of the trail. Small snakes guided me along the path, over tiny streams, and ultimately through a set of graffitied limestone gate posts of the vanished Silverbrook estate. The trail opened into a giant meadow full of purple wild aster, ruins of bubbling artisan wells, and man-made trout ponds. The freshwater from which eventually flows into a spring and over a waterfall at the ridge of the river bluff. Upon visiting, it was clear this land has a history - recorded energy of greatness. Something about its natural beauty and ephemeral remains of opulence encouraged me to learn the stories of those who may have been here before. This research project began as an exploration of what I thought might have been a haunted house, local lore, and legend. A quick internet

search for "Silverbrook" provides rumors about the mansion as home to gangsters, a brothel, generations of teens trespassing for parties, and ultimately enough notoriety for a lifetime. However, this is not where my research guided me.

I obtained a type-written property history, the author of which is unknown, from an Interstate Park employee. There I found two names marked with an asterisk next to which it said: "1958 - 1962\* Annabelle and James Rideaux Operated a drinking club for blacks from the cities. \* Information regarding ownership during this period is sketchy."

This led me to my search for Annabelle and James Rideaux. First, I found James' WWII Draft Card with Annabelle listed as his wife, his employer listed as The University Club, a decades-old country club for the St. Paul elite, and his home address as 707 Rondo Avenue. An avenue that doesn't exist today for tragic reasons. This is where the untold history of Silverbrook begins as a tale of two significant places demolished in the name of progress.

**"This is where the untold history of Silverbrook begins as a tale of two significant places demolished in the name of progress"**

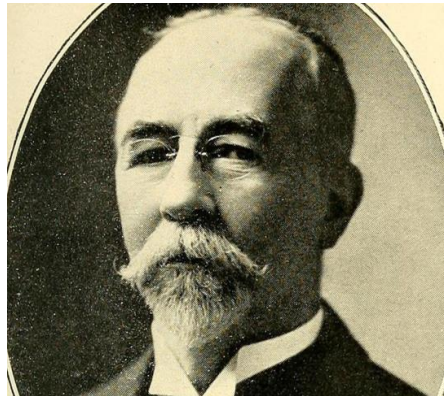
SERIAL NUMBER 1994	1. NAME (PRINT) James Hamilton Rideaux		ORDER NUMBER 1084
2. ADDRESS (PRINT) 707 Rondo Ave St Paul, Ramsey Minn			
3. TELEPHONE Da 4504	4. AGE IN YEARS 34	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Washington La	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs Annabelle Rideaux Wife			
8. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 707 Rondo Ave St Paul, Ramsey Minn			
9. EMPLOYER'S NAME University Club			
10. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 420 Summit Ave St Paul, Ramsey Minn			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
REGISTRATION CARD D. M. NO. FORM 3	James Hamilton Rideaux (Registrant's Signature)		

James Rideaux's WWII Draft Card, 1940-1947

## Silverbrook's Beginnings

Hezekiah and Fannie Holbert built the 19-room, limestone, mansion on over 200 acres in 1895 as a summer retreat from their home at 659 Summit Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. Hezekiah and Fannie along with three live-in servants, Hezekiah's mother, and five children lived seasonally at Silverbrook. Hezekiah was a banker and grain broker, but he purchased this land to try his luck at speculating and established the Holbert Mining and Mercantile Company. Hezekiah was convinced there was a mineral fortune in what is now Interstate Park. You can visit the defunct copper mine and laboratory ruins while hiking the Silverbrook trail today. Hezekiah and Fannie only spent a few summers at the mansion. Interstate Park was established after much opposition from Holbert, and when it was clear he could not monetize the land, he sold Silverbrook in 1908. Thus began a long string of moderately wealthy landowners from the Twin Cities who used the property and mansion as a summer playground.

The same was true for Robert and Nina Payne from the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood in St. Paul, who



Hezekiah Holbert (b. 1842 - d. 1912) and his wife Fannie Holbert (b. 1850 - d. 1918)

purchased Silverbrook in 1929 and undertook the task of updating the property and installing a large stone fountain and wading pool, the remnants of which are still visible. After many years of enjoying their country retreat, the Paynes sold the property to Frank and Agnes Wukawitz who developed it into The Silverbrook Resort - a Swiss-style ski resort. They turned the mansion into a ski lodge with a cafe and clear-cut a ski hill, behind it down to the river promising a 100-foot drop. However, the resort operated for one season before Frank Wukawitz unexpectedly passed away and Agnes Wukawitz was unable to continue running the resort. Agnes sold the property to James and Annabelle Rideaux in 1956.



Nina Payne with her dog by the fountain at Silverbrook, 1940

## Annabelle and James Rideaux

Annabelle and James Rideaux were business owners, civil rights activists, socialites, and residents of St. Paul's thriving, Black neighborhood Rondo. They were both born in 1906 in southern states, James in Louisiana, and Annabelle in Alabama. However, they did not meet until they both ventured north, to Minnesota in search of opportunity. Annabelle left Alabama in the 1920s and moved to Minnesota with her baby daughter, Muriel, and her Mother. James and Annabelle married in St. Paul in 1935.

James found work in St. Paul in affluent white country clubs like the University Club and the Town and Country Club. Later, he worked for the railroad. In the 1950s and 1960s, he was a Red Cap Night Captain at Union Depot. He used his position as a Red Cap to help Black travelers find safe lodging - often sending them to Rondo where Annabelle ran a boarding house for travelers. This is an instance of his commitment to combating racial injustice and the struggle for Civil Rights for Black Americans.



St. Paul Depot Red Caps; James Rideaux kneeling at right, 1952.

His commitment radiated and impacted everyone in his circle. Most notably, his brother, Woodrow Rideaux, was the President of the Los Angeles, Watts Chapter, NAACP in the 1970s and '80s. After James' death in 1990, he was awarded the Roy Wilkins Award for his service to the cause of Civil Rights. Both Annabelle and James were also devoted to their Church. In 1945 James was appointed the President of the Brotherhood of Camphor United Methodist Church. Later, he was appointed a member of the board of trustees.

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## Frequently Asked Question: "Who made this beautiful display case for the bison bones?"

After some researching, I have discovered that our bison bone case was made by Roger Johnson (pictured here with his wife Dawn and the display case) of Dresser, Wisconsin. A friend of Darrell Kittleson, the man who was influential in getting the bones back to Polk County, Roger had been woodworking for 20-25 years, and was the perfect person for the job. We at the Polk County Museum thank you Roger, for letting us display your wonderful skills.

## Find Your Family Tree

Information by an article written by Gene Rebeck, a Duluth, MN-based freelance writer.

### Cyndi's List

A free site with links to genealogical resources.

**[Cyndislist.com](http://Cyndislist.com)**

### DNA Tests

These are online genealogical record networks that can study your background via your DNA.

**[Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) | [23andme.com](http://23andme.com) | [MyHeritage.com](http://MyHeritage.com)**

### USGenWeb Project

A volunteer-run site with links to free online resources, including individual state and county websites.

**[Usgenweb.org/search.html](http://Usgenweb.org/search.html)**

### National Geological Society

Another site that compiles links to free genealogy research websites.

**[Ngsgenealogy.org/free-resources/websites](http://Ngsgenealogy.org/free-resources/websites)**

### Ellis Island Foundation

Offers free access to the records of the thousands of passenger ships that brought immigrants to the U.S.

**[Libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger](http://Libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger)**

### National Archives

Gives you free access to census, military service, immigration, naturalization and land records.

**[Archives.gov/research/genealogy/start-research](http://Archives.gov/research/genealogy/start-research)**



## Unexpected Find for the Family of Donald Amlee

The family of Donald Amlee were pretty excited to find a picture of their dad and grandpa, on the wall of our Pioneer School. The Lanesdale school was located in Laketown Township, and was organized in 1874.

## Annabelle and James Rideaux *continued*

Shortly after moving to Minnesota, Annabelle's name started appearing in the society column of the St. Paul Recorder and Minneapolis Spokesman. She was a gifted seamstress and taught community homemaking and sewing classes at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center and Welcome Hall. Annabelle was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, St. Anthony Hill Garden Club, the St. Paul Urban League, the Cameo Social Club, and was the Housing Committee Chair for the NAACP National Convention in 1960. In 1963 she owned and operated "Annabelle's" dress shop in Minneapolis.

For most of their married life, James and Annabelle hosted friends, family, and community at their home at 707 Rondo Avenue. However, in 1959 they were forced to relocate by the City of St. Paul. During this time, the City was implementing plans for Interstate 94 and demolishing Rondo to make way for the infrastructure. Families and business owners watched as all they worked for was systemically destroyed. The November 13th, 1959, issue of the Minneapolis Spokesman announces James and Annabelle's move, "Come December 1, Mr. and Mrs. James Rideaux of 707 Rondo Ave., will be greeting their friends in their newly decorated and remodeled home at



*The Cameo Social Club Christmas Party, Annabelle Rideaux (center in black off-shoulder dress), 1956.*

765 Marshall Ave."

During this time, they were operating the St. Croix Valley Country Club, all the while, their home, and the homes and gathering places of Rondo were in jeopardy. This made their work in providing a place of rest, relaxation, and community even more important.

**Social and Personal**  
★ ST. PAUL ★

**Week End Guest:** Mrs. Dolly Crushshon, 910 Fuller Av. spent the week end at the St. Croix Valley Country Club, guest of Mrs. James Rideaux.

**Omission:** The names of Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Brown were omitted in our report of the Laissez-nous-faire Bridge club's party held on January 3. Mrs. Brown is president of the club.

*The first public mention of the St. Croix Valley Country Club in the St. Paul Recorder, 1957.*

**St. Paul NAACP  
Installs Officers  
At Dinner Meet**

The St. Paul Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People met Sunday, January 20, at the St. Croix Valley Country Club, Osceola, Wis.

A complete dinner was served preceding the business session.

Newly elected officers for 1957 were installed as follows: Frank M. Smith, president; Richard Fox, first vice president; Donald Lewis second vice president; Leonard H. Carter, treasurer; Carl L. Weschcke, secretary.

*A selection from the article in the St. Paul Recorder describing the NAACP Officers Dinner held at the St. Croix Valley Country Club, 1957.*

## The St. Croix Valley Country Club

Annabelle spent 1956 redecorating the Silverbrook mansion and readying it for weekend guests. James quietly maintained the property and prepared gardens for Annabelle to plant and grow flowers. They renamed Silverbrook, "The St. Croix Valley Country Club." This was the beginning of their dream of owning and operating a country club. The first public mention of the St. Croix Valley Country Club is in the society column of the January 18th, 1957, issue of the St. Paul Recorder.

The St. Croix Valley Country Club served as a satellite community meeting place for Rondo social and civic clubs like the Cameo Social Club, Credjafawn Club, and the Twin City Forty Club. These clubs were created in the early twentieth century because of the prejudice Black St. Paul residents experienced. They were not welcome in white society or to patronize many of the city's restaurants, bars, hotels, and clubs. Instead, Black residents gathered at the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, churches, living rooms, rumpus rooms, and backyards. A Country Club, an escape from

the city and to the St. Croix River Valley, would have been a welcome addition to the venues of Rondo. A weekend at the country club meant socializing, hiking, fishing, archery, and an ongoing game of pinochle with Annabelle on the back porch overlooking Silverbrook Falls.

The St. Croix Valley Country Club was also home to NAACP chapter meetings and celebrations. Most notably, an event was held on January 20th, 1957, where the St. Paul Branch of the NAACP installed new officers and discussed the moral aspects of segregated housing.

It was a place of respite, Black excellence, and luxury – Debutantes, birthday parties, and relaxation were plentiful. From 1957 to approximately 1961, the Cameo Social Club held Cotillion events like charm school, luncheon, and slumber parties at the country club. The Cameo Club would organize a bus to transport young debutantes from Rondo to spend a weekend at the country club before the culminating Cotillion ball at the end of the season. Typically, the ball was hosted in a rented ballroom of a hotel in Minneapolis



The Polk County Historical Society's annual meeting will be held  
**Thursday, October 6, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.**  
**3rd Floor of the Polk County Museum**  
**120 West Main Street, Balsam Lake, WI 54810**  
**Courtroom**

*For your convenience, elevator is located on the basement level floor. Use North entrance.*

## The St. Croix Valley Country Club *continued*



Girls of the hour — our 1957 Debutantes, who will be presented by the Cameo Social Club at its Second Annual Cotillion Ball on Friday evening in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Lowry, for which beautiful pink and green suede invitations were issued a week ago. The girls are pictured in this Mason-Hickman photo on the staircase of the St. Croix Valley Country Club on Saturday evening where they were the guests of the proprietor, Mrs. Annabelle Rideaux at a Slumber Party and Sunday morning breakfast.

Reading from the top, Joyce Ann Hughes, next row to the left, Myrna Kathleen Day, Carolyn Joyce Hawlings and Lorraine Dorothy Johnson; next row, Elsie Mae Stone and Gail Yvonne Payne; at bottom, Janet Onetta Walton and Marva Ann Boyd.

*The 1957 Cameo Social Club Debutantes on the staircase inside the St. Croix Valley Country Club.*

or St. Paul. The Cameo Social Club's Cotillion program was the first of its kind in the upper Midwest. Many of the debutantes in Annabelle's care went on to have impactful careers and carried on the tradition of serving their communities. Joyce Ann Hughes, shown in the photo below, was the first Black woman to teach at the University of Minnesota Law School and to receive a tenure track position at any historically white institution. Joyce Ann also went on to serve on the Board of Directors of the National Urban League.

While Annabelle and James worked hard to establish their country home-away-from-home, their work and their community were in St. Paul. The proximity of the country club from St. Paul proved to be challenging and as Rondo splintered to make way for the new interstate, they foreclosed on the Silverbrook property in 1964.

After the foreclosure, a Los Angeles-based real estate developer purchased the property. Vandals were especially tough on the mansion, even going so far as to cut a hole in the roof, and the developer hired a local family to live in the home and maintain it. In 1970, the developer sold Silverbrook to the State of Wisconsin and it remained vacant. The State of Wisconsin determined they did not have the resources to maintain the property and declared it a hazard in 1974. They burned the mansion down and removed any remnants of what it once was. They removed marble columns from the veranda and filled the poured concrete foundation with earth.

For the past year, I have been completely enthralled with the legacy of Silverbrook and Annabelle's spirit- A Black woman, a beloved matriarch, a graceful leader who thrived for herself and others. Because of a chance encounter on Ancestry.com, I met and befriended her great-granddaughter, Cherrelle Swain, who is currently working on a documentary about her ancestral healing process and the story of her remarkable great-grandmother. My research work continues by supporting her. As Annabelle guides us forward, research continues, and I am committed to ensuring others who hike the Silverbrook Trail know about the remarkable Rideauxs who did so much for their community, their people, and refused to be erased.



*Newspaper clipping documenting Silverbrook's destruction, 1974.*



## Re-creation of the World's Oldest Liquor

The Vasa or Wasa is a Swedish warship built between 1626 and 1628. The ship sank after sailing roughly 1,300 meters into her maiden voyage on August 10, 1628, taking with her bottles of liquor the crew consumed out at sea. These bottles were discovered in 1961 by a team that salvaged the ship. The contents were analyzed and now has been recreated. The liquor is said to be a kind of spiced brandy that tastes like anise, with a 33% alcohol content. The drink will be sold by the Swedish Systembolaget and the profit of the sales will go to the preservation of the ship Vasa.