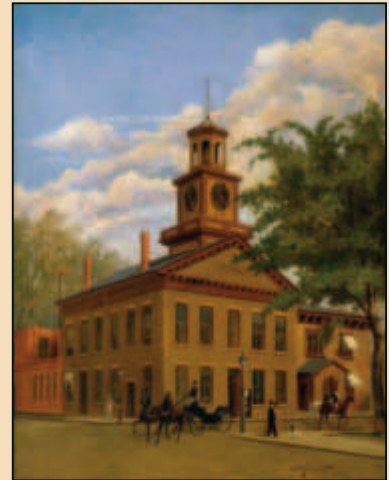


MARRIAGE RECORDS ARE AN EXCELLENT RESOURCE for genealogists, local historians, and researchers of all kinds. The Minnesota Historical Society recently received 153 microfilm rolls of Ramsey County marriage records dating from the beginning of Minnesota Territory in 1849 through 2000. Preparing them for public use, I discovered a gap that illustrates both the vicissitudes of records preservation and the thoroughness of the MHS's early guiding-light, J. Fletcher Williams, who served as librarian from 1867 until 1893.

The marriage records scroll by without incident until the page for 1855, where a startling note reads: "Marriage certificates for 1855, 1856, & 1857 &c lost by Clerk G. W. Prescott. They were taken to his home to be recorded & then lost." Such a statement would normally spell the end to any search for an official document but, as it turns out, not all of the information was forever lost.

Among the missing was the record of Williams's marriage to Catherine Roberts on July 16, 1857, performed in St. Paul by John Mattocks, pastor of First Presbyterian Church. Surprisingly, the entries for marriages from 1858 through 1861 document their union, noting the correct date but filed and recorded on March 28, 1876. Although there is no evidence, one can reasonably conclude that Williams, the consummate chronicler of events, discovered the gap and urged the clerk of court to record his marriage nearly 20 years after the event—in the closest available space to his wedding date.



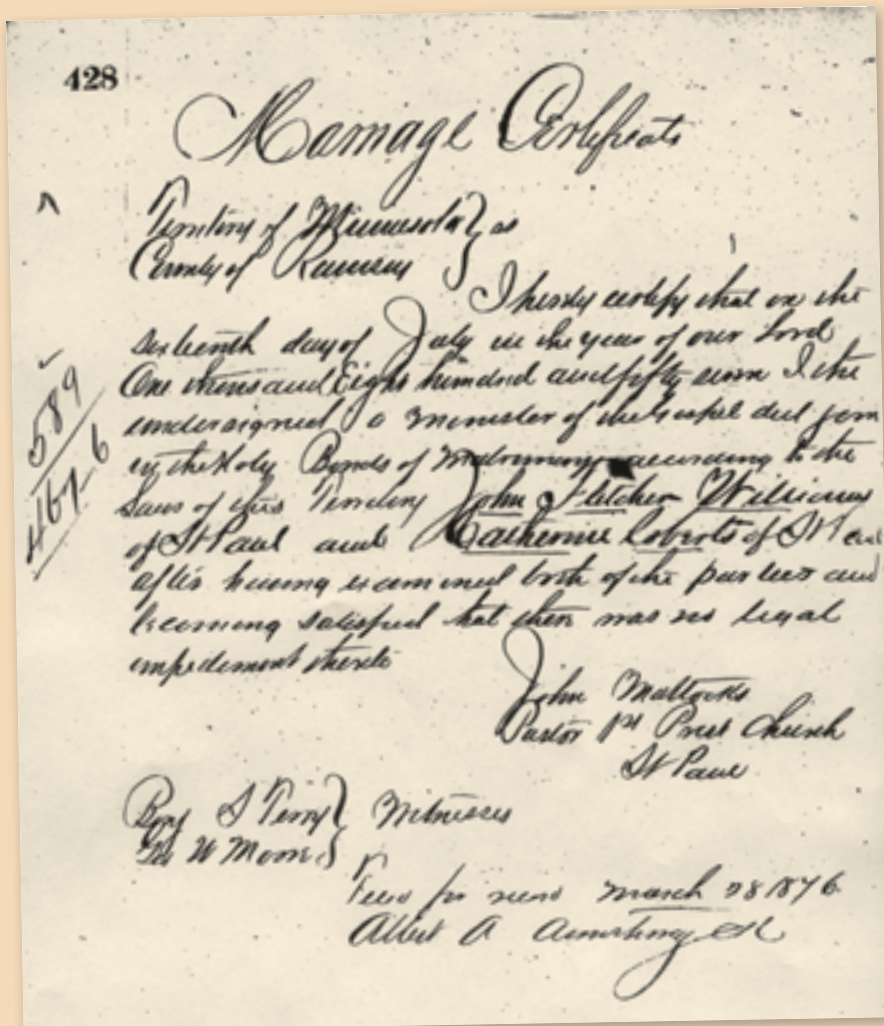
And the hapless clerk whose misdeed has been preserved in the historical record? George Washington Prescott, born in Maine in 1826, went on to serve in the Civil War with the Sixth Minnesota and then was a Baptist minister in Minnesota and Wisconsin. In 1892 he moved to California.

The MHS has marriage records from 17 counties and continues to augment its collection. The Ramsey County records were obtained with the help of a generous library patron who earmarked a donation toward their purchase.

—Duane P. Swanson, government records specialist

—Duane P. Swanson, government records specialist

LEFT: The Williams's marriage record, State Archives Microfilm 433, Book A, reel 1, p. 428. ABOVE: St. Paul's First City Hall, erected in 1857, the year Williams married; oil painting by Otto Norquist, 1889.





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