

= Louis F. Menage =

Louis Francois Menage (August 3 , 1850 ? March 18 , 1924) was a real estate speculator and prominent figure in early Minneapolis , Minnesota history . Originally born in Rhode Island , he settled in Minneapolis in 1874 . Characterized as a " tycoon " and " robber baron , " Menage earned a fortune developing land on the city 's borders into residential housing and financing the mortgages to enable people to buy his properties . During the 1870s and 1880s , he developed large areas of South Minneapolis including much of the area around Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet . He also developed a luxury resort on Lake Calhoun and built a corporate headquarters which was at the time the city 's tallest skyscraper .

After a costly legal battle over a real estate deal with William S. King and the financial downturn of the Panic of 1893 , Menage 's real estate empire collapsed and he fled the country to avoid prosecution on charges of embezzlement . The charges against Menage were eventually dropped after several key witnesses had died or become hesitant to testify against him . He spent the later portion of his life working in real estate in the New York City area and never worked in Minnesota again .

= = Early life = =

Menage was born in Providence , Rhode Island in 1850 . His father , John Menage , was the descendant of French immigrants ; his mother Mary was a descendant of Mayflower passenger John Howland . The family moved to New Bedford , Massachusetts , when Menage was young . While in Menage was high school , his father died of tuberculosis , leaving Louis and his brother to take over the family 's confectionery business . In 1871 , a doctor diagnosed Menage with " weak lungs " and suggested he move west to avoid falling ill with tuberculosis himself . Menage moved to Minnesota shortly thereafter . After a brief time teaching classes in shorthand at a Minneapolis business school , he found work as a business clerk in Northern Minnesota at a logging camp near Pokegama Lake .

= = Real estate empire = =

In 1874 , Menage returned to Minneapolis and entered the real estate business with partner H. C. Brackett . Menage gradually built an empire by purchasing farmland at the fringes of the city , platting and developing the property into residential neighborhoods , then financing the mortgages for people to purchase the homes . He also worked with Thomas Lowry , head of the city 's streetcar system , to ensure that new lines were built to serve the outlying areas he was developing . Much of the present day Prospect Park neighborhood , and the areas surrounding Lake Harriet and Lake Calhoun , were developed by Menage and his companies .

A small inclusion in the title of every property Menage sold was a covenant stating that it would revert to Menage or his descendants if alcohol was ever sold there . Menage would release this covenant in exchange for a small cash payment .. This so @-@ called " Menage forfeiture clause " remained in force on thousands of properties for decades . The cash payments to release it generated a significant side income for Menage and his successors . In 1937 , the Minnesota Legislature passed a law nullifying the clause .

On September 13 , 1876 Menage married Amanda A. Bull , daughter of local businessman and Minneapolis pioneer Benjamin S. Bull . They had one daughter , Bessie (1877 ? 1940) .

In June 1883 , he opened the luxurious Lyndale Hotel near Lake Calhoun . One of the city 's first luxury resorts , the hotel featured multi @-@ room suites and luxurious common areas including a dining room , music hall and two verandas . The hotel 's opening was celebrated with a gala attended by many of the city 's leaders and elites . A streetcar was specially arranged to take guests back to Minneapolis after the night 's festivities had ended .

= = Lyndale Farm = =

Menage ran into legal trouble with the purchase of a large plot of land south of Minneapolis known as " Lyndale Farm . " Owned by William S. King , the land had been placed in trust with New York financier Philo Remington in 1875 after King had fallen into financial trouble . Remington (joined later by a partner , Robert Innes) advanced King a sum of money in exchange for managing the land and seeing that it was developed or sold for a fair price . When King declared bankruptcy in 1877 , Remington and Innes purchased the Lyndale Farm land from King for a token sum but promised to honor their previous agreement .

Remington and Innes later met with Menage and , in 1882 , devised a plan to sell King 's land to Menage for development without telling King . Menage also negotiated a separate deal with Innes (likely behind Remington 's back) where he agreed to pay him one @-@ third of the profits made from the land as a finder 's fee and in exchange for Innes ' help keeping Remington and King at bay . Menage proceeded to develop the land into housing and profited handsomely .

By 1885 , King became aware of the scheme and retained lawyer John Van Voorhis to sue Menage . Menage claimed ignorance of the first agreement between King , Remington and Innes and asserted that he had purchased the property outright from the two . After a lengthy trial in Minnesota District Court , Menage lost and was ordered to return the land to King along with all proceeds from the development of the land . Menage appealed to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1886 , however the lower court 's decision was upheld .

The total amount Menage paid to King was approximately \$ 2 million (\$ 52 @.@ 67 million in 2015) . While at the time Menage maintained he was not burdened by the judgment , he later recalled the protracted legal battle and subsequent loss " threatened bankruptcy and ruin . "

= = Northwestern Guaranty Loan Company = =

In 1889 , Menage founded the Northwestern Guaranty Loan Company to handle the mortgage side of his real estate business . Among the members of the company 's board were : John S. Pillsbury , William D. Washburn , Thomas Lowry , William Henry Eustis , Loren Fletcher , and many other important political and business figures . His real estate business was handled by a separate company called the Menage Realty Company . In 1890 , Menage further cemented his place in the city by building the Northwestern Guaranty Loan Building (more commonly known as the Metropolitan Building) , the city 's tallest skyscraper , at a cost of more than \$ 1 million (\$ 26 @.@ 34 million in 2015) . The building was home to all of Menage 's various companies as well as other offices , a rooftop restaurant , and a private law library .

While Minneapolis was the center of Menage 's empire , he also owned land and property elsewhere in the Midwest and western states including Bozeman , Montana , Galveston , Texas , Gary , Indiana , and Madison , Wisconsin .

= = Philanthropy = =

Menage contributed to various charitable and philanthropic causes in Minneapolis . He donated funds toward the construction of the first Minneapolis Public Library building , provided a temporary home for the Ripley Memorial Hospital , and also sponsored a new bell in the First Baptist Church which he attended .

In 1890 , Menage sponsored a scientific expedition to the Philippines in partnership with the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences . The expedition , led primarily by Dean Conant Worcester and Frank Swift Bourns , collected thousands of specimens of birds and animals ; some , such as the Philippine slow loris (*Nycticebus menagensis*) and the Sulu bleeding @-@ heart (*Gallicolumba menagei*) , were named in honor of Menage . While many of the specimens from the expedition appear to have been lost or discarded , some remain in the collections of the Bell Museum of Natural History and the Field Museum of Natural History .

= = Financial collapse and later life = =

In the early 1890s , Menage had begun to purchase land near Puget Sound in Washington , accumulating several thousand acres which he planned to develop into an iron mine , smelter and steel mill , along with housing for the workers . To finance the development he sold an early form of mortgage @-@ backed security to investors in New England and Europe . When the Panic of 1893 occurred , investors found that Menage 's properties were fraudulent . Many of the deeds were held by random names taken from the Minneapolis and Saint Paul telephone books , the properties themselves were unimproved , and the payments to investors were being made out of the bank 's funds .

His Northwestern Guaranty Loan Company (and , by the law of the era , its shareholders) were liable for the losses . Menage was indicted on charges of embezzlement but fled to Guatemala before a warrant for his arrest was issued . Menage 's assistant , Donald Streeter , was tried twice but both trials ended with a hung jury . In an 1895 letter , Menage protested his innocence , blaming the Lyndale Farm lawsuit for hurting his finances and also noting (correctly) that : " the practice of using another 's name on a note or mortgage is not unknown in the business world . " In 1899 , the charges against Menage were dropped after several key witnesses had died and others appeared reluctant to testify . By some accounts Menage was present in the courtroom at the time ; others suggest he never returned to Minneapolis .

Menage spent the rest of his life living in New Jersey and working in real estate in the New York City area . He died in 1924 . He is buried in Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis .