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Southern Minnesota Pioneer Journalism A Study of Four Newspapers of the 1850's¹

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THE PIONEER journalism that spread across the Middle and Far Western states in the decade preceding the Civil War was intrinsically the popular journalism of James Gordon Bennett, Horace Greeley, and Henry Raymond, with variations occasioned by factors of economic, social, and political significance. Within the radius of available transportation and communication facilities, metropolitan newspaper techniques were employed. The telegraph and the railroad were taking news and the raw materials of printing as far west as Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, but farther north and west the steamboat, the stagecoach, and an irregular mail service had to serve the needs of pioneering publishers. For territories like Minnesota, the 1850's were the pre-railroad, pre-telegraph era.

Minnesota had not acquired all the implements of civilization its eastern neighbors possessed by the fifties, but the territory was augmenting its population and developing its resources at such a rate that it was ceasing to be frontier and was beginning to acquire the settled characteristics of an established commonwealth. Only a beginning, however, had been made. The pioneer pattern persisted. Rivers were still the chief avenues of travel and immigration, the ox cart still creaked across the prairies, and fear of Indian depredations had not been banished. On the other hand, Minnesotans were beginning to discuss prospects for statehood and the part that must

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be played in the approaching sectional conflict. The booster spirit was rife. Townsites appeared overnight, land speculators were everywhere, and each roadside hamlet was confident of becoming a metropolis as soon as the railroad should reach it.

As newspapers had done previously in areas east of the Mississippi, those of Minnesota played an important part in the progression from frontier to commonwealth. From the time the territory was organized in 1849 until statehood was achieved in 1858, more than eighty newspapers were founded in Minnesota. There, as elsewhere, early immigration followed the navigable rivers. Many of the pioneer Minnesota papers were established in towns along the Mississippi and its tributaries. No matter how much speculation on the coming of railroads there might be in the early river town journals, behind it there was always a solid foundation of news and comment dealing with steamboating and water-borne commerce.

Typical of the personal journalism which characterized the era were the picturesque personalities of some of Minnesota's territorial editors. Ignatius Donnelly, early legislator and community builder, was one of the founders of the *Emigrant Aid Journal*, first printed in the East and then moved to Donnelly's newly established town of Nininger in Minnesota Territory. James M. Goodhue, an eastern lawyer who had tried newspaper publishing in Wisconsin, established in St. Paul the territory's first paper, the *Minnesota Pioneer*. Joseph R. Brown, who was associated with a number of territorial papers, went to Fort Snelling in 1819 as a drummer boy, became an Indian trader, and married a mixed-blood woman.

Sailor, gold-hunter, adventurer, Sam Whiting tried his hand at journalism in Winona during the middle fifties. Another adventurous territorial journalist was Parker H. French, editor of the *Northern Herald* of Little Falls. French and Whiting were known among Minnesota territorial editors as having engaged in Central American adventures, French as secretary of state for General William Walker in his Nicaraguan filibuster, and Whiting as the founder of the first newspaper in Panama in 1849. Most valiant member of the group was a woman, Jane Grey Swisshelm, who became editor of the *St. Cloud Visiter* in the fiercely partisan late

fifties, when her forthright editorials on such controversial subjects as women's rights and slavery led to the destruction of her press by enraged adversaries.²

Perhaps no better general statement of the service of the press in such territories as Minnesota has been presented than that contained in the following paragraph: "The local newspapers, usually established by town proprietors or by ardent political partisans, constituted the settler's principal source of information about the rest of the world. They told him what his neighbors were doing; they led him along his political pathway; they brought him current literature, which ranged from doggerel verse to the best writing of the time in America; and they advised him of unexploited opportunities in lands, town sites, goods, or produce. In their advertisements as well as in their editorial columns they reflected the economic life of the times."³

The news pattern in pre-Civil War Minnesota papers differed considerably from that of the 1870's and subsequent decades. Lack of telegraph and railroad facilities made national news more remote, less fresh. Much of it was clipped from other newspapers, some of it was acquired by correspondence. The hour-by-hour, or even day-by-day, aspect of telegraphic journalism was conspicuously lacking. This was particularly true during the winter season when river commerce was closed and overland mails were uncertain.

The editor of the *Winona Republican*, in one of the early issues of his paper, described the narrow escape of "Doc" Hudson, mail agent on the "eastern route," who went through the ice at La Crosse. Chief damage was to bags containing newspapers. "Newspapers by the dozen," commented the *Republican*, "were frozen solidly together, and our office mail when spread out on the floor, rattled like cakes of ice." The following winter the editor of the *Republican* lamented as follows: "Two weeks without mail from 'the United States!' Just think of it, ye 'down east' editors, who have all sorts of facilities — railroads, telegraphs, stagecoaches, etc. — for bringing the

² Daniel S. B. Johnston, "Minnesota Journalism in the Territorial Period," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10:274, 305; Arthur J. Larsen, ed., *Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm*, 16 (St. Paul, 1934).

³ Herman Roe, "The Frontier Press of Minnesota," *ante*, 14:402.

daily news — just think of it, and sympathize with us. We unhappy newspaper-makers out here in Minnesota are sometimes under the disagreeable necessity of 'waiting for the wagon'—and when we do wait, we are occasionally put off without getting a ride. Well, here is a mail at last — two weeks from Dubuque! Thanks to Uncle Samuel and his efficient mail carriers for that — *only* two weeks behind the age!"⁴

Generalities concerning pioneer newspapers are easily made; attempts to categorize content are more difficult, particularly with reference to news. Much of the news in frontier papers was so mixed with editorial content that only roughly can it be screened out. On the basis of relative emphasis, however, it is possible to achieve an approximate separation of material.⁵

This was done by taking the *Winona Republican* and the *Chatfield Democrat* as examples of typical Minnesota territorial papers, and measuring the space devoted to news, editorials, magazine material, and advertisements in selected issues published from 1855 to 1858.⁶ The proportion of material appearing in these papers that might be thus classified was apparently affected by the relative size and location of the two communities. Since Chatfield was considerably smaller than Winona, as well as farther from transportation facilities, the *Democrat's* news sources were more limited than were those of the *Republican*. This is reflected in the measurements made, which show that the *Democrat* had only approximately a third more

⁴ *Winona Republican*, December 25, 1855, December 9, 1856.

⁵ This was done along the lines set forth by Malcolm M. Willey in his volume on *The Country Newspaper: A Study of Socialization and Newspaper Content*, 35-37 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1926). For the present article, two newspapers were measured with some care, two were surveyed more casually, and several more were looked into for purposes of comparison. Although only about a dozen of Dr. Willey's main categories were used, an approximation of his method of analysis yielded interesting material on these early Minnesota newspapers. News was separated first into two main divisions: national and international, and local and community. Under each of these main headings came the following sub-categories: political and administrative, economic, sensational, and personal. Non-news content, consisting mainly of editorial matter, magazine material, and advertisements was easily classified.

⁶ Material was measured and classified in the issues of the *Winona Republican* for November 20 and December 25, 1855, February 19, May 20, August 26, November 25, and December 9, 1856, and February 3, 17, May 5, August 4, and November 11, 1857. For the *Chatfield Democrat* the issues were studied that appeared on September 11, October 14, November 11, and December 9, 1857, and January 6, February 3, March 3, April 3, and May 8 and 15, 1858.

news than editorial matter, and that the *Republican* had nearly two-thirds more news. In the issues measured, magazine material in the *Democrat* exceeded that in the *Republican* by more than a thousand inches. The *Republican* led in space devoted to advertising by almost the same amount for the sample numbers examined. In each newspaper, the ratio of news and editorial comment to magazine material and advertisements is about one to three.⁷ A more casual survey of material in the *Red Wing Republican* and the *Mantorville Express*, newspapers representing towns with a population relationship similar to that of Winona and Chatfield, presents evidence of similar proportions.⁸

Territorial editors in the decade before the Civil War took their national governmental and political news secondhand from eastern newspapers and periodicals. News of continuing interest on these subjects during the middle and late 1850's was concerned chiefly with the slavery issue, which took tangible form in such manifestations as intersectional strife in Kansas and the Dred Scott case; or it related to the Thirty-fourth Congress, the fight between federal and Mormon troops, and the 1856 presidential election. The admission of Kansas into the Union held great interest for Minnesotans, who looked to such action as preliminary to their own assumption of statehood.

Such items of national economic news as were reprinted had to do with banking and general business problems having western ramifications. Items on eastern bank failures became more numerous as the panic of 1857 approached. Sensational news of national scope differed little from that of today. Fires, explosions, wrecks, murders, burglaries predominated. Some of these national stories of sensational cast, clipped from exchanges, reflected the pressures and interests of pioneer life. There were occasional accounts of

⁷ In the issues measured, the *Winona Republican* published 866 inches of news, 374 inches of editorial comment, 1,078 of magazine material, and 3,370 of advertising; while the *Chatfield Democrat* had 747 inches of news, 526 of editorial comment, 1,136 of magazine material, and 2,171 of advertising.

⁸ Issues were read of the *Red Wing Republican* for September 4, October 2, November 6, and December 11, 1857, and January 15, February 19, March 26, April 16, and May 14, 1858; and of the *Mantorville Express* for July 16, August 13, September 17, October 15, November 12, and December 17, 1857, and January 14, February 11, March 18, April 17, and May 22, 1858.

duels. The *Chatfield Democrat* gave space in a number of issues to a wager between two residents of Louisville, Kentucky, relative to the marksmanship of a Captain Travis, who was to shoot oranges from the head of a boy and from his outstretched hands at a distance of ten paces. Indian depredations and massacres were noted in such stories as the *Winona Republican's* item on the massacre of Colonel A. W. Babbett, secretary of Utah Territory, and his party by Cheyenne Indians.⁹

It was in the handling of local news, however, that territorial papers took on the complexions of their communities. For the outer boundaries of their regional areas they used exchanges and, in some cases, correspondents. Lacking organized news-gathering facilities, territorial editors presented some of their freshest news by printing letters, documents, speeches, and minutes of official meetings. The May 5, 1857, issue of the *Winona Republican* contained an account of Governor Samuel Medary's first official communication, a message to the "Gentlemen of the Council and of the House of Representatives." It recommended changes in the organization of the district court system in the territory. The governor's message called to the attention of Minnesotans two recent acts of Congress that had made local administrative and economic news of great importance. One authorized the "people of the Territory of Minnesota to form a Constitution and State Government preparatory to their admission into the Union on an equal footing with the original States." The other was an act "making a grant of land to the Territory of Minnesota, in alternate sections, to aid in the construction of railroads in said Territory."

In the issue of February 19, 1856, the *Winona Republican* devoted four and a half columns to Henry H. Sibley's address before the Minnesota Historical Society on the history of the territory. The full text of the address took ten columns, the remaining five and a half columns of it appearing in the succeeding issue. The address had been delivered in St. Paul three weeks earlier. A story of political importance in the *Republican*, which gave its facts in much the same fashion as does the present-day routine news story, began as

⁹ *Chatfield Democrat*, April 3, 1858; *Winona Republican*, November 25, 1856.

follows: "A Republican District Convention for the 9th Council District, will be held at Winona, on the 1st day of September next, at 1 o'clock P.M., to nominate two Representatives to be supported at the ensuing election."¹⁰ The December 17, 1857, issue of the *Mantorville Express* ran an interesting item on the Dodge County census of that year, which was taken as part of the territorial enumeration required under the enabling act of 1857. The account was strictly factual and it presented valuable data on the size and racial make-up of one of Minnesota's southern territorial counties. Dodge County, the *Express* reported, had 1,176 voters, of whom 926 were native-born and 250 foreign-born. The total population of the county was 3,680, with Pennsylvania, New York, and New Hampshire having the largest representations among the settlers.¹¹

Three stories of sensational cast which appeared in the *Winona Republican* during 1857 are so representative of the rugged aspects of pioneer life that they are worth reproducing. They are concerned with two agencies of communication vital to early settlers—the overland mail and river traffic. The first story, taking them in chronological order, was apparently clipped from the *St. Peter Courier*. "A correspondent of the *St. Peter Courier* gives an account of the death of a Mr. Hoxie Rathbun of that place, who was frozen to death while on his way to that city with the Sioux City Mail. He died in fifteen minutes after being found. He had remained in the position as discovered for twelve days, and had gnawed his fingers and hands to satiate his hunger. He was an old and esteemed citizen of Mankato."¹²

The other two are pioneer river stories. The opening of navigation on the river was of considerably more importance in the 1850's than it is today. Winona, at the foot of Lake Pepin, was cut off from St. Paul and other communities upstream in the spring until the lake was sufficiently free of ice to be open to navigation. Ice remained longer in Lake Pepin in the spring of 1857 than it ever

¹⁰ *Winona Republican*, August 26, 1856.

¹¹ Photostatic copies of the original manuscript population schedules of the 1857 census are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. For a general statement about the census, see William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:359 (St. Paul, 1921).

¹² *Winona Republican*, February 3, 1857.

had been known to stay before. Here is the *Republican's* brief but dramatic story, published on May 5, of the race among a score of steamboats which were the first to reach St. Paul through Lake Pepin after the ice broke up: "The first boat of the season to pass through Lake Pepin was the Galena, on the 1st inst. The War Eagle reached St. Paul just fifteen minutes after the Galena, having lost a man overboard at the head of the lake. Following close after those two were some twenty or twenty-five other boats, all of which had been waiting for the opportunity several days, and some of them weeks. The excitement amongst this fleet of steamers is said to have been intense, and oil and rosin were freely used in 'firing up.' A splendid banner and purse of \$500 awaited the first boat at St. Paul, which the Galena was fortunate enough to win. Since the first steamboat navigated the Upper Mississippi, the ice in Lake Pepin was never known to prove a barrier to navigation so late as the 1st of May before."

Rivermen, whether they rafted logs or manned steamboats, were a picturesque segment of Minnesota's early mobile population. The rivalry between raftsmen and boatmen is reflected in the following item: "We learn that a desperate fight occurred at Reed's [*sic*] Landing, one day last week, between some raftsmen and the hands on board the Galena. A raftsman went on board at Wabashaw, and after having arrived at Reed's Landing, attempted to go ashore without paying his fare. Thereupon, a regular fight between the hands and officers of the boat, and a lot of raftsmen on shore ensued, in which bricks, stones, pistols etc., were used. The captain got knocked down and one or two of the raftsmen were wounded."¹³

Indian troubles in the 1850's sometimes took the form of marauding parties or sporadic raids. The *Chatfield Democrat* of September 11, 1857, in an elementary follow-up story, said: "We mentioned the departure on Monday last, of the St. Paul Light Cavalry Company, to Cambridge, to remove from that vicinity, a number of Chippewa Indians, who have been committing depredations in the neighborhood of Sunrise settlement."¹⁴

¹³ *Winona Republican*, August 4, 1857.

¹⁴ For the full story of this uprising, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:325.

Personal and cultural items, which chronicled the social, educational, literary, and religious activities of the territory, made up a very small part of the news in most pioneer papers. In genial vein, under the caption "Quick and Well Done," the *Chatfield Democrat* of November 11, 1857, presented the following account of a dance at a local hotel, the Medary House: "On Monday evening last, a fine cotillion Band, arrived in town and expressed a wish to give us a specimen of their science on the 'cat-gut.' Our gallant young bucks jumped at the chance, and by the time the supper table was cleared away, they had the large parlors of the 'Medary House' filled with the prettiest ladies in all creation, ready for a hop. The music was excellent—supper A. No. 1, hot—dancing good and lively, and considering 'how quick the thing was got up' they had a most delightful time. Our folks are live ones; and no mistake, and we anticipate much fun and frolic at the 'Medary,' and other places this winter."

The Christmas Day issue of the *Winona Republican* for 1855 published an account of a lyceum meeting of the Y.M.C.A. at Laird's Hall, at which was discussed the subject: "Would a Pre-Emption Law, granting 160 acres of land *gratis*, to each actual settler, be beneficial?" The issue of the *Winona Republican* for February 17, 1857, carried an item on the report of the regents of the University of Minnesota. It announced, among other things, that the contract had been let for the construction of the "main portion of the University, to cost \$49,000." A story of church activities, presented factually, took the form of a list of appointments of the Minnesota conference of the Methodist Episcopal church, which was printed in the *Republican* for August 4, 1857. It was essentially a "name story," covering six districts throughout the territory and consisting of a list of appointees from the towns in each district.

Local news of economic import was to be found in booster items describing recently established places of business, in tax lists and reports by state and county officials, in commodity price lists for the retail market, and in similar listings and reports.

Editorial comment permeated a large part of the non-advertising material printed. Much of the news was editorialized; the editorial

page contained opinions of the editor on national, state, and community affairs; and editorial utterances from other newspapers were clipped and distributed liberally throughout the paper. It was an incredibly dull territorial journal which did not, in some fashion, reflect the opinions and personality of its editor.

Territorial newspapers were almost invariably town boosters. Land promotion concerns were directly interested in some of them, but the great majority of papers, although not owned by land companies, were editorially vocal on behalf of community development. Writing retrospectively for the issue which closed the first volume of the *Winona Republican* on November 25, 1856, the editor gave expression to sentiments typifying the desire of the western publisher to let Easterners know the advantages of his particular Garden of Eden: "Its weekly visits to hundreds of firesides in far eastern homes," reads the editorial, "have not been unproductive, we believe, of good to our bluff-encircled young city, and to the inviting country that stretches away behind it to the fountains of the winding St. Peter. Its favorable but truthful accounts of Southern Minnesota and its invaluable resources—of which 'the half has not been told'—have not been without their due influence in bringing to our shores the thousands who have during the past summer found homes amongst us."

Early Minnesota editors indicated their independence of spirit by occasional gibes at Easterners and Far Westerners. "The report that the Pacific is to be enlarged, for the purpose of accommodating the growing commerce of California," wrote the editor of the *Mantorville Express* in the number for August 13, 1857, "is without any foundation whatever." The December 23, 1857, issue of the *Chatfield Democrat* quoted an item from the *Boston Post* to the effect that "At Chicago the Mississippi river is full of ice, and navigation has closed north of Dubuque." The *Democrat* commented, "That is about equal to the paragraph which appeared in the columns of the [New York] Tribune which located Keokuk in the south western part of Iowa, and displays about as much knowledge of western geography as did the London paper which made

the startling announcement that the Mississippi river was frozen over as far up as Pittsburg. Schoolmasters are wanted in the east."

The *Democrat* lost few opportunities to comment unfavorably on Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. The thirdhand comment which follows, taken from the *Boston Post* by the *New York Ledger* and picked up by the *Chatfield Democrat* of October 14, 1857, indicates the extent of party bickering in the 1850's: "The *New York Tribune* seems to revel in accounts of loathsome licentiousness. It lets slip no opportunity to parade in its columns the details of vice, colored and adorned with the wits and fancies of editorial imaginations which seem to glow with unusual and congenial lustre, whenever immorality is the theme." The *Democrat* then appended its own comment: "By'r lady! these be parlour words!—but what cares the *Tribune*? The editors of that philosophical journal, undoubtedly understand the tastes and moral *states* of their readers; and simply give them what they ask for. Whether the employment is a laudable one is quite another question; and whether the readers and admirers of the *Tribune* are at this date the sort of people to be corrupted by anything 'pernicious' is still another. We rather think it is too late for the old subscribers." More pointed and readable is the humorous piece in the March 3, 1858, issue of the *Democrat*, captioned, "Paper Blankets," which discusses the kind of dreams one might have when using certain newspapers as blankets. When the experimenter used the *New York Tribune* he "thought the world was turning black, saw a host of women dressed in breeches, and eating bran bread together, also saw black spirits and monkeys."

Community-conscious pioneer editors did more than extol the virtues of their towns and make caustic comment on eastern publishers. They urged civic improvements, warned against the evils of speculation and inflation, rejoiced over benefits or advantages obtained by their fellow-townsmen, and expressed their political and ethical opinions, frequently with reckless fervor.

The *Republican* persistently kept after Winonans during the middle fifties with regard to the need for public school facilities. In an editorial urging the organization of an adequate educational

system, the editor reminded his readers that "Winona is without a single institution worthy of being called even a primary common school." A few months later the *Republican* printed an impassioned plea by a local poet, entitled "Our Glory and Our Shame."¹⁵ After calling attention to the agricultural bounty and business prosperity of the community, the writer asserted, with both rhyme and reason:

In this fair town we so much praise,
Where near five thousand people dwell,
No SCHOOL HOUSE yet attracts the gaze,
Nor peals its *humanizing* bell.

Rhymed comment on a local situation appeared in the February 19, 1856, issue of the *Republican*. It could very well have been the work of editor Sam Whiting, who frequently rushed into verse where poets might have feared to tread. A new steamboat, to be called the "Bonny Boat," had been proposed for the run between Winona and La Crosse. The writer paid tribute to it in doggerel rhyme:

Our bonny boat, long may she float,
Upon our noble river.
We have no fears — hip, hip, three cheers —
Our bonny boat forever.

The *Republican* appears to have done a better than average job in its early years in promoting the cultural interests of its readers. The following excerpt from an editorial urging the formation of a literary association throws interesting light on the way in which frontier communities compensated for lack of educational and cultural facilities: "Now that . . . the long winter evenings are at hand, would it not be well to provide for a series of lectures," the writer inquired. He believed that the people of Winona could hardly expect to hear "professional lecturers," but he suggested a "plan which we have seen tried with good success in other young towns. It is this — let some active person procure an agreement from all who . . . will deliver a voluntary lecture. A committee . . . will designate the evening upon which each person will lecture, and give notice of the place, time and subject." The editor felt sure that many com-

¹⁵ *Winona Republican*, May 5, August 4, 1857.

petent lecturers could be found among the ranks of local clergymen, lawyers, and physicians.¹⁶

With intersectional conflict looming more and more ominously on the national horizon in the closing years of the decade, it is not surprising that Minnesota territorial papers should have been seriously, and often vociferously, concerned with political, economic, and ethical issues of country-wide significance. Editors assailed each other and each other's papers and parties with little reserve. The *Chatfield Democrat*, in its issue of September 11, 1857, warned its Norwegian Democratic readers to be on guard against misrepresentations being made against the Democratic party in the territory through the columns of the Norwegian paper, *Emigranten*. Although the paper was published in Wisconsin, it was circulated gratuitously among Norwegians of Minnesota Territory by "*Black Republican* wire pullers of this Territory." In an editorial taunting Republicans over the Democratic victory of 1857 the *Chatfield Democrat* referred to the Republican party as "split-up—half white, half black no party at all." In the same editorial the writer produced a choice specimen of personal invective with his reference to a St. Paul editor as the "drunken bloated *donkey* of the '*Minnesotian*.'" At about the same time the *Red Wing Sentinel* wrote of its rival, the *Red Wing Republican*: "The *Republican* has become so notorious for lying as to be totally unworthy of belief. It is edited and superintended by old maids and broken down ministers."¹⁷

On the issues of free and slave territory and of slavery in general the *Winona Republican* and the *Chatfield Democrat* presented contrasting editorial views, typical to some extent of divergent opinion on these matters in the North just before the advent of the 1860's. Not many Minnesota papers probably were pro-Southern, but some Democrats in the territory, as well as throughout the North, took their politics with sectional as well as ideological seasoning. Up until May, 1858, at least, the *Chatfield Democrat* appears to have had pro-Southern leanings. Its "Carrier Boy's New Years

¹⁶ *Winona Republican*, November 25, 1856.

¹⁷ *Chatfield Democrat*, November 11, 1857; *Red Wing Republican*, November 6, 1857.

Address," in the issue for January 6, 1858, included the following rhymed reference to its journalistic rival in Chatfield:

The *Republican* is a woolly concern,
And thinks of nothing but niggers;
While the Democrat trys hard to learn,
To comprehend *National* figures.

In its issue for March 3, 1858, the *Democrat* quoted part of an editorial from the *Kansas Daily Ledger* to the effect that "Niggers are not the great bone of contention in Kansas. . . . The real bone of contention is power and spoils." The excerpt closed with the plea, "Let Kansas be admitted into the Union some how or other, and with some kind of a constitution, that we may have peace."

The *Winona Republican*, on the other hand, was a strong anti-slavery journal, as were many of its political compatriots. In the issue of May 20, 1856, the *Republican's* main editorial was captioned "The Presidency." It was preceded by an item announcing that the national Republican convention would be held in Philadelphia on June 17. In summing up the political outlook, the *Republican* characterized Pierce as a "second rate New Hampshire lawyer, aspiring for Presidential honors a second time"; Douglas as "a man of talent and energy, but sold body and soul to southern principles and their extension." Of Buchanan, the editorial said, "From being an old Federalist he has turned to a rank Loco Foco." The issue of the 1856 election, the *Republican* stated, "is one and only one, that of slavery and freedom—whether we will longer tacitly submit to aggression and encroachment, or whether we shall confine within its present boundaries that peculiar institution which is a curse to its supporters and a stain upon our reputation abroad."

In an editorial on its first page, later in the summer, the *Republican* quoted from several newspapers to make the point that slavery endangered the status of labor generally. "We wish," it reads, that "free laborers could hear slaveholders talk, or read daily their organs," drawing the inference that such experience would cause readers to shun the Democratic party as the organization sympathetic to the South. The editorial quoted from the *Standard* of

Charleston, South Carolina, a statement that "If white men accept the office of menials, it should be expected that they will do so with an apprehension of their relations to society, and the disposition quietly to encounter both the responsibilities and liabilities which the relation imposes," and it included the *Standard's* further comment that "It is getting time that hotel waiters at the North were convinced that they are servants, and not 'gentlemen' in disguise." The reference of a Missouri paper to German and Irish laborers as "white slaves" was cited, and the *Republican* concluded: "Free laborers would do well to consider the spirit of the Slave Power and its necessary results."¹⁸

Essays, sketches, editorial articles, poetry, and fiction provided the pioneer editor with an ever-present supply of filler. If mails were uncertain and news was lacking, there were always local contributors and, most dependable of all, material clipped from magazines and other newspapers. For all but a few, reading matter was scarce in pioneer communities and the local paper was considerably more than a mere informer. Magazine material in the *Winona Republican* and the *Chatfield Democrat* made up nearly half of the non-advertising material. Papers like the *Red Wing Republican* and the *Mantorville Express* adhered fairly closely to the same pattern.

As a result of the prevalence of clipped material, there devolved upon the editors of the early papers the responsibility for an eclectic journalism which gave many readers their only knowledge—fragmentary though it might have been—of the content and flavor of well-known periodicals of the decade. Among those represented were *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Peterson's Magazine*, *Graham's American Monthly*, *Harper's New Monthly*, *Putnam's Monthly*, the *Knickerbocker*, or *New-York Monthly Magazine*, *Punch*, *Chambers's Journal*, and *Porter's Spirit of the Times*. In addition to magazines of general circulation, early Minnesota editors had access to specialized publications in the fields of agriculture, medicine, science, and business. Newspapers seem to have been abundantly available as exchanges, although they reached Minnesota irregularly in bad weather.

¹⁸ *Winona Republican*, August 26, 1856.

Among authors whose works were represented in pioneer Minnesota papers were John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, Henry Ward Beecher, Bayard Taylor, William Cullen Bryant, Charles Dickens, and Nathaniel Parker Willis. Informative articles covered such topics as "A Cheap Ice House," "Mormon Politics and Religion," "The Sources of the Mississippi," the "First Underground Railroad," a "New Bullet Machine," "A Slave Pen in the West," "O'Connell and the Irish Bank Crisis," and "A Remarkable Aurora Borealis."

During the four months he served as editor, Captain Whiting gave the *Winona Republican* the flavor of his own unique personality. His contributions not only added considerably to the interest in the *Republican's* magazine material, but they also revealed, in prose and rhyme, an adventurous background probably unmatched by that of any other Minnesota journalist of the period.

For the first issue of the *Republican*, published on November 20, 1855, Whiting not only penned the usual prospectus, but under the caption "Our Prospects," he briefly recounted his experiences with an Arctic exploring expedition in the previous summer and extolled the virtues of Winona and southern Minnesota. Captain Whiting's description of his first view of Winona upon returning from his Arctic travels will still strike a responsive chord in the hearts of southern Minnesotans. "As the steamer opened the reach of the river," he wrote, "and we saw the grand old Sugar Loaf, rearing its time-crowned head above the lovely plain, and the myriad lights streaming from the windows of the now populous town, we felt a thrill of joy, such as those only can appreciate who after long wanderings over the stormy deep, return again to the quiet scenes of Home, and the rare enjoyments of Western life." Other Whiting features appearing from time to time were a column of verses entitled "Murmurs of the Sea," a narrative describing "A Voyage Round the World," a "Journal of a Polar Cruise in Search of Dr. Kane" covering the period from June to October, 1855, and "Leaves from a Rover's Log—A Voyage through the Magellan Straits and two years in the Gold Mines of California."

Interesting local writing appeared now and then in columns devoted to magazine material. In the *Republican's* May 5, 1857, issue, "Bdelpha" had a St. Paul column which contained lively commentary on human interest aspects of town life in the territory's capital. The writer pictured the muddy streets and the opening of transportation on the river; he described politicians, railroad promoters, and proprietors of townsites. He gave his readers a graphic account of a pioneer river town in the spring, telling of the arrival of the first boat, the joy or sorrow expressed by those welcoming friends and relatives or hearing of their deaths. In connection with the unusual interest in possible railroad locations he wrote: "An Advertiser map was brought in here (Winslow House) and posted upon a bulletin board, and left for each one to build his own Railroad with a pencil. The consequence was in a short time that about as many roads were built as the whole land in the Territory will accommodate. Farming lands must become very valuable if every man gains his cherished desire for a Railroad. We of course made our road by drawing a line upon the map, and what is most important it was drawn in favor of Winona."

The *Winona Republican* for November 11, 1857, picked up a local feature story from the *Red Wing Sentinel*. It was captioned "Indian Sensibility" and it pictured the red man in a different light from that in which he has been traditionally shown. The story told how workmen, excavating on Main Street, opened an Indian burying ground and tossed to one side a number of skulls and bones. A passing Indian with his squaw and small son was so moved by the sight that he "drew his wife and little one to him, and wept like a child." The workmen, overcome, covered up the bones and "retired to another part of the work. . . . It was indeed a sorrowful scene, and could not but effect those who witnessed it."

Reminiscent of pioneer days and dramatically suggestive of the Indian lore chanced upon now and then by early settlers is a sketch entitled "An Indian Adventure" which appeared in the *Winona Republican*. It is prefaced with the statement that a member of the Pacific railroad expedition of 1853 heard the tale from a "Delaware Indian guide, as they were traversing a mountain pass

which was marked by numerous gullies and ravines." It continues, "He was traversing this path at midnight, accompanied by his squaw only, both mounted upon the same horse, and the night was so dark that he could neither see the outline of the hills nor the ground at the horse's feet, when he heard a sound (which he imitated) so light as to be scarcely perceptible to an Indian's ear, of an arrow carried in the hand, striking once only with a slight tick against a bow. Stopping, he could hear nothing, but instantly dismounted—his squaw leaning down upon the horse that she might by no possibility be seen—and placed his ear to the ground, when he heard the same sound repeated, but a few feet distant, and was satisfied that however imminent the danger he had not been seen or heard, for no Indian would make such a noise at night in approaching his foe: he therefore instantly arose, took his horse by the bridle close to his mouth, to lessen the chances of his moving or whinnying, and one hundred and seventy of his deadliest enemies, the Sioux, on a war party, filed past him within arm's reach, while he remained unobserved."¹⁹

Such tales were beginning to have the remote quality of legend by the late 1850's. The practical day-by-day aspects of living overshadowed the picturesque side. For every paragraph dealing with Indian affairs there were columns announcing the wares of flourishing mercantile establishments.²⁰

Most of the territory's well-established communities were booming in the fifties, and advertising rates were for the most part low. A "square" of ten or fewer lines cost from fifty to seventy-five cents for one insertion; the price of a column of advertising appearing every week for a year ranged from fifty to seventy-five dollars. The bulk of the advertising in territorial papers was done, of course, by town merchants. Larger and older towns in the trade area also

¹⁹ *Winona Republican*, August 4, 1857.

²⁰ The ratio of sixty per cent of non-advertising material to forty per cent of advertising matter is common in modern newspapers. The *Winona Republican* had in ten issues 3,370 inches of advertising to 2,318 inches of non-advertising material, and ten issues of the *Chatfield Democrat* had 2,171 inches of advertising to 2,409 of non-advertising. It is therefore apparent that pioneer Minnesota newspapers differed considerably from one another as well as from modern papers in the ratio of advertising and non-advertising matter.

advertised in the Minnesota papers. Dubuque and Winona business concerns advertised in the *Chatfield Democrat*; Dubuque, Galena, and La Crosse were represented in the advertising columns of the *Winona Republican*. National advertising was limited pretty largely to patent medicines and eastern newspapers and magazines. Firms selling land warrants were consistent advertisers. Sheriffs' sales, mortgage proceedings, probate and other county business made up the bulk of the legal notices.

Lacking codes and systematized procedure, the territorial Minnesota advertiser gained the attention of the reader by devices which hardly would be accepted today. "Scare-heads," either grossly inaccurate or only remotely related to the subject, were not uncommon. The Crimean War was one of the subjects used by advertising copy writers. "Great Excitement in Wabashaw! The Allies are about fortifying themselves within the business part of the town" is the headline for a mercantile advertisement in the *Winona Republican*. In December, 1855, more than three years before the territory was admitted to statehood, a new stock of drygoods and groceries was announced in the same paper under the heading: "Look Here! Look Here! Minnesota Received Into the Union!"²¹

Although rhymed advertising copy was not general, the *Republican* occasionally printed examples of it. The two which follow are among the more interesting:²²

ROBERT PIKE, who writes this ditty,
Lives at Minnesota City,
Is Postmaster, Magistrate,
Buys and sells Real Estate,
Conveyancer and County Surveyor,
(The City's small and needs no mayor.)
Sectarian rules he dares resist,
And thinks Christ was a Socialist.
Loving mankind and needing dimes.
He waits to serve them at all times.

Less philosophical but more informative is this advertisement:

²¹ *Winona Republican*, November 20, December 11, 25, 1855.

²² *Winona Republican*, December 25, 1855, May 20, 1856.

DEALERS in stoves and all the metals,
Cow Bells, Chains, and Iron Kettles,
Knives and forks, knobs and latches,
Hoes, shovels, and cupboard catches,
Tin pans, screws, ten-penny nails,
Locks and keys, and copper pails,
Bells and brushes, and blacking, and sashes,
And razors cheap, on account of mustaches.
A stove for thirty dollars with 25 graters,
Pork, cheese, and corn, flour and potatoes,
All thrown in with two flour sifters,
Six gridirons, and ten lid lifters.

Rhymed advertising, however, was, like the "mustaches" mentioned by the advertiser, an affectation of the period. Between the middle fifties and the late sixties, tremendous changes took place in the new Northwest. The "myriad lights streaming from the windows" which so delighted sailor-editor Whiting on his return to Winona from the Arctic in 1855 came from candles and oil lamps. By such light Minnesota's early settlers read their four-page weeklies. In a few short years the Civil War increased greatly the demand for fresh information, while railroad and telegraphic expansion linked Minnesota and its neighboring states and territories with the rest of the world. The increasing importance of news seemed to whet the appetites of readers, sharpened journalistic techniques, and rendered obsolete the pioneer newspaper.



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