

INTERIOR of the  
St. Paul Union Depot  
March, 1885

# SETTLERS' PERIODICAL



## *Eugene Smalley and the Northwest Magazine*

EDGAR C. DUIN

WHEN EUGENE SMALLEY died in 1899, his *Northwest Magazine* reported that "the country lost one of its most active and influential intellects, and the Northwest said farewell to its best friend." According to this eulogy, "he was regarded as the ablest and most trustworthy authority on all that concerned the western division of the Union. He labored indefatigably to bring new people into the Northwest, to develop its great natural resources, and to inform the outside world of its mighty possibilities."<sup>1</sup> This is a fitting characterization of a man who devoted the last sixteen, and most fruitful, years of his life to extolling the beauties and advantages for settlers of the great New Northwest, that segment of the United States which lies between Lake Superior and the north Pacific coast.

Smalley, who was born on July 18, 1841, in Randolph, Portage County, Ohio, lived

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MR. DUIN, who lives at Falls Church, Virginia, drew the material for this article from a thesis on "Aids to Settlers in the Northern Pacific Land Grant" which he prepared in 1950 at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

to become one of the most influential of the railroad publicists of the late nineteenth century. His connection with the Northern Pacific Railroad, which began in 1883, was to earn for him a secure place in the annals of both settlement and railroad history. From that year the *Northwest Magazine* appeared under Smalley's editorship as a promotion project of the Northern Pacific.

The literature issued by the railroad and its subsidized publicists during the period of settlement could not alone have induced people to leave their old homes and go to strange frontiers to live. Publications merely provided the impetus to a movement which would have taken place whether or not railroad and immigration pamphlets and periodicals like the *Northwest Magazine* had been distributed. Their main purpose was to guide those whose minds were already made up or, at most, to help wavering spirits "over the hump," and convince them that their future lay in the West. The advertising furnished by

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<sup>1</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, January, 1900, p. 34.

the *Northwest Magazine* and similar publications helped direct the course of emigration to the new railroad lands. In effect these publications and men like Smalley planned the settlement of a frontier.

First, last, and foremost Smalley was a newspaperman who devoted his whole life to literary pursuits. He may have inherited some of his talent for writing from his father, who supported the antislavery movement in his publications. His abolitionist leanings, as well as his son's attendance at an antislavery college in New York, served to influence the young man, who later became a staunch supporter of the newly formed Republican party.

Young Smalley showed his interest in the printed word at an early age, for he was only eleven when he set out to learn the printer's trade. After attending the public schools in Ohio and college for a year, he launched his career. Even while in school, he made a living by setting type and teaching, but he soon turned to journalism, working both as a reporter and a publisher on small-town newspapers. His career was interrupted in 1861 by the Civil War and, putting aside the pen for the sword, he enlisted in the Seventh Ohio Volunteer Infantry and served with honor until near the end of the conflict, when he was wounded and discharged.

While still in uniform, however, he frequently wrote for newspapers reports of engagements in which he participated, thereby serving both as soldier and eye-witness correspondent. After his discharge, this practice secured for him a place on the staff of the *Cleveland Herald*, but he did not remain long with that paper. He soon went to Washington, D.C., and for a number of years held minor government positions. They were unimportant as such, but they afforded him ample opportunity to become intimately acquainted with men in public life and to make contacts that were later useful.

Smalley returned to newspaper work in 1868 as a free-lance journalist, and after

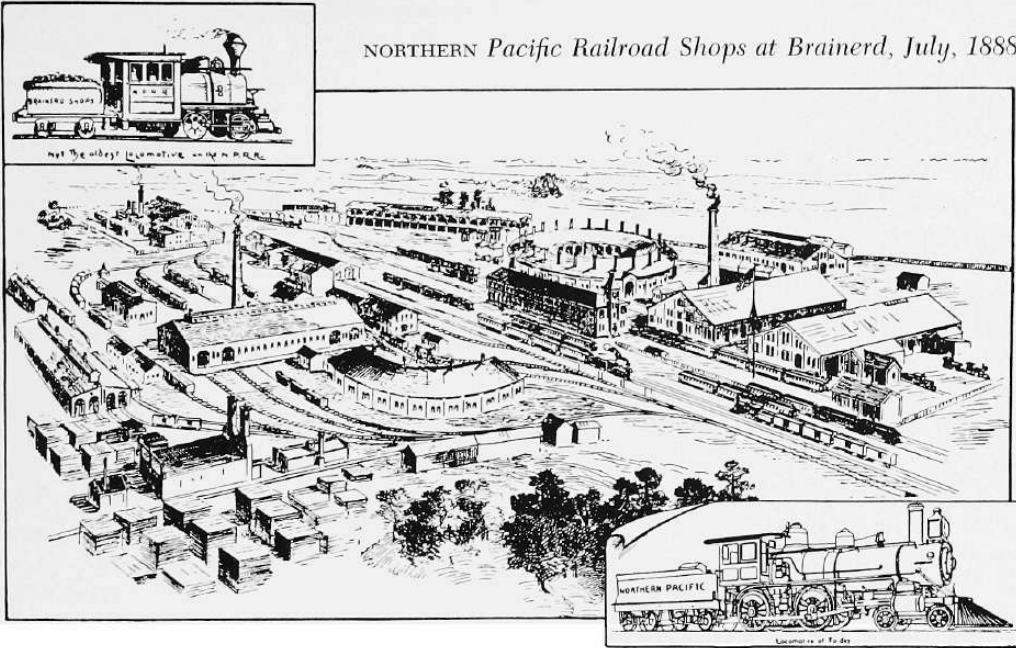
contributing some articles to the *New York Tribune*, he joined its staff in 1871. He wrote also for the *Forum*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Century*, and it was for the latter that he first traveled westward from Lake Superior to see and write about the states and territories of the New Northwest. This trip marked the beginning of his career of writing on behalf of the Northwest.

Smalley first became associated with the Northern Pacific Railway Company in 1883, when it completed its great transcontinental line. To celebrate and publicize the event, Henry Villard, president of the road, arranged a grand excursion on the newly completed railroad, inviting Congressmen, diplomats, leading journalists, the prime ministers of Great Britain, Germany, and Austria, and other dignitaries to participate as guests of the railroad.

At the same time, attracted by Smalley's articles on the Northwest in the *Century* for 1882, Villard had his road engage the young journalist to write a history of the Northern Pacific. The resulting work—a profusely illustrated book of 437 pages—was quickly prepared. More than three hundred pages are devoted to the history of the road, and this is followed by minute descriptions of the territory through which it passes—its towns, minerals, lands, climate, and so on. The book established a pattern which Smalley followed later, especially in the *Northwest Magazine*.

With financial backing from the Villard enterprises, the magazine was first issued as an illustrated monthly in 1883 by the E. V. Smalley Publishing Company, located at Sixth and Jackson Streets, St. Paul. It was distributed both in the United States and Europe through that firm and its branch offices in Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, Oregon, and Liverpool, England. Under titles that varied from time to time, the *Northwest Magazine* served for twenty years as a semiofficial organ of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

NORTHERN Pacific Railroad Shops at Brainerd, July, 1888



Those years coincided with the era of settlement of the Northern Pacific grant, from the road's completion to the end of the period of cheap lands in the Northwest. Thus the magazine is a rich source of information on the social history of the region stretching westward from Lake Superior during the years of settlement and consolidation. According to one historian, "the items in *The Northwest* concerning the movements of colonies westward are indispensable to a detailed study of the settlement of the vast territory between Lake Superior and Puget Sound."<sup>2</sup>

Although the *Northwest Magazine* was subsidized by the Northern Pacific, it was also intended for public sale. Thus Smalley did not confine himself to standard propaganda literature. In order to increase circulation, he provided attractive and amusing features, mixing propaganda with entertainment, though he often slanted his articles to readers who were likely to be interested in settling on new lands.

In format the *Northwest Magazine* was much like contemporary variety magazines designed for family reading, with a large

page, two or three type columns, and numerous illustrations. While the majority of its lead articles were concerned with towns and regions in the railroad land grant or with problems of settlement, they were written in a lively and interesting manner to catch the attention of even those who did not intend to emigrate immediately. Furthermore, the magazine featured fiction, poetry, jokes, cartoons, and pictures. Not only were there humor and casual entertainment for the reader, but such items as reports on grain and industrial stocks and notes on new books.

Typical of the varied articles published in the *Northwest Magazine* were those on "Saint Paul, A Year's Growth in the Progressive Capital of Minnesota," on "The Westward Movement of 1886," on "Montana for Immigration and Capital," on "Dairying in Minnesota," and on the Big Bend country in Washington. The article on St. Paul discussed the city's banks and

<sup>2</sup>James B. Hedges, "Promotion of Immigration to the Pacific Northwest by the Railroads," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 4:199n. (June, 1928).

possibilities for investment and new enterprises. A section on the city's new Union Depot stressed its cleanliness and the comforts it provided for emigrants. "There are kitchen and laundry facilities," the article said, "and a large lunch counter where good, wholesome food is served to emigrants at cost, or in case of destitution, free." To keep the depot in a state of "perfect cleanliness," the floors of the second story were "inclined sufficiently to drain water rapidly into a gutter along the side of the room."<sup>3</sup>

Among features especially intended to aid emigrants was an enumeration of "Hints to Settlers—Useful Advice to People Going to Make Homes in New Regions." It discussed the relative merits and uses of log cabins and claim shanties; directions were given for building them, and advice was offered on what to bring in the way of furniture. For example, after evaluating sheet iron camp stoves and kerosene burners, the writer advised that it would be

"cheaper in the end to get a good heavy cast iron stove . . . preferably with elevated bake oven." In addition, prospective settlers were informed that in order to emigrate, a single person needed three hundred dollars in cash, while for a family of four, five to eight hundred dollars were necessary. In general, the article said, a minimum of two dollars a week should be allowed for each person. Specific information on wages and prices, seeds, tools, and farm implements also was included. In conclusion, the article offered settlers this advice: "Beware of money-lenders, high interest and mortgages. Better be satisfied with a homestead of 160 acres than to buy a big tract and get in debt for it."<sup>4</sup>

Still another article on "Crops That Can Be Raised in Minnesota" dispelled the currently fictitious notion that the Northwest was a permanently frozen waste. It informed the reader that this new region could grow anything that could be raised in Ohio, and proceeded to enumerate crops ranging from sweet potatoes to okra and tobacco.

A correspondent writing on "Climate Cure in Minnesota" told those who were thinking of emigrating for their health that "Minnesota is not a health resort like Florida or Southern California, for invalids who expect to sit idly on hotel piazzas. . . . People who come here in the early stages of lung complaints should come prepared to stay and take up the business of life here anew." Although Minnesota "is no longer a new state," the article continued, "there are no end of opportunities" for new settlers "to get established in business or professional pursuits or upon the land. . . . More than half the fertile land in the State is still untilled. Cities and towns are growing fast. Come and look the ground over and make up your mind where you want to live and the way to make a living will

COMIC strip for Northwest readers, July, 1897



1. "Don't let me fall, George."



4. "I'm falling, you wretch."



2. "Oh, you feeble idiot."



5. "Ow, I'm going."



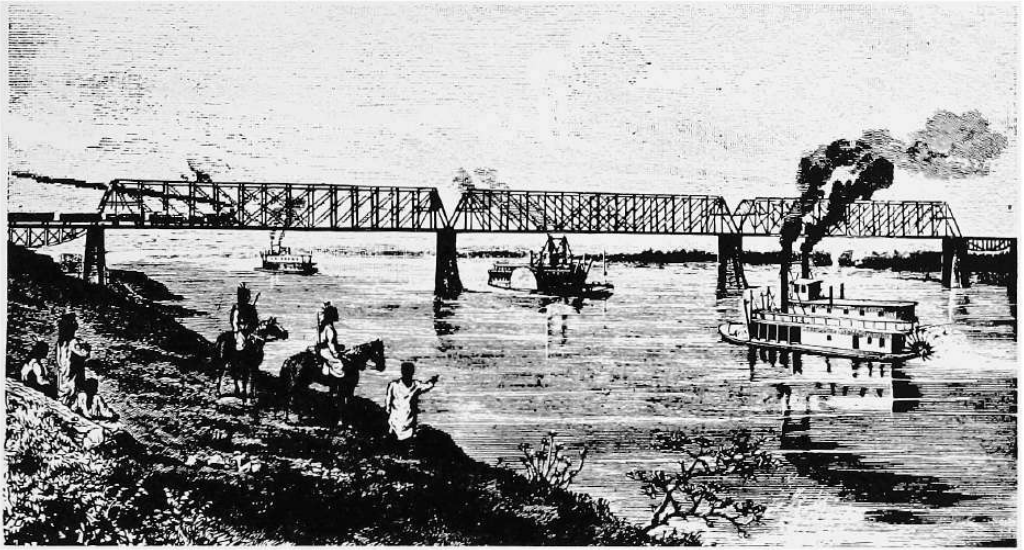
3. "Now why couldn't you hold me like that before?"



6. " . . . Beast."

<sup>3</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, March, 1885, p. 1-13; February, 1886, p. 1-2; May, p. 6-7, November, p. 8-9, 1896; November, 1897, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, April, 1885, p. 10-12.



NORTHERN Pacific bridge across the Missouri, from Smalley's history of the road, p. 77

not be hard to discover," the writer suggested.<sup>5</sup>

A department known as "Our Letter Box," supplemented by appropriate articles, proved invaluable to those seeking business and employment opportunities in the Northwest. A random examination reveals that among frontier needs were a general merchandise store at Minnewaukan and a gristmill at New Salem, both in Dakota Territory, and a furniture factory and a bank at Spokane Falls in Washington Territory. At West Superior, Wisconsin, there were excellent opportunities for merchants and mechanics. Among the questions answered was one from W. S. Valentine of Dover, New Jersey, who asked where to find the best place along the Northern Pacific route for raising sheep.<sup>6</sup>

As editor of the *Northwest Magazine*, Eugene Smalley was tireless, writing editorials, primarily for prospective settlers, and turning out a stream of articles extolling the area open to them. He answered letters by the hundreds, thus making his

<sup>5</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, January, 1887, p. 10; January, 1889, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, April, 1885, p. 9; January, 1886, p. 16.

magazine serve as a clearinghouse for information between prospective settlers and those who had arrived earlier.

Under the sponsorship of the *Northwest Magazine*, Smalley also organized parties to tour the area included in the railroad land grant. Their members examined resources, interviewed settlers, recorded their opinions of productiveness and climatic conditions, and noted the reactions of incoming settlers, homeseekers, and businessmen. The travelers looked for favorable lands on which farmers still might settle, and took note of towns which had grown rapidly as a result of agricultural expansion and development. The results of these exploratory trips were incorporated in appropriate articles and published in Smalley's *Northwest Magazine*.

The extent of the magazine's influence is suggested in a statement published by Smalley's son in 1903. It reads: "The *Northwest Magazine* is the only authoritative publication which devotes its columns to the furthering of western interests. It has a distinctive field and a unique position among the literary publications of the country. Its circulation covers the territory

from Pennsylvania to the Pacific Coast and from Texas to the Northern provinces of Canada, including the great States of the Middle West, the Northwest, Southwest and the Far West, in addition to reaching the entire section of the Canadian Northwest. It reaches the best people in all the towns and country in this great prosperous field. It is consulted by investors and home-seekers throughout that section, reliable, interesting and always profitable to investors. It is read carefully and retained for reference in home and counting houses. 'You can't cover the West and the Northwest without the Northwest.'"<sup>7</sup>

Lending substance to this statement is the fact that twenty-three states and territories were represented in letters to the editor appearing in a group of issues picked at random. In addition to the two states (Minnesota and Oregon) and four territories (Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Washington) of the Northwest, the list includes Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The circulation of the *Northwest Magazine* ranged from about twelve thousand to more than forty thousand. In 1899 it claimed "the loyal support of nearly 30,000 subscribers and 150,000 friendly readers."<sup>8</sup> The high point in its circulation was reached in 1902, when Victor Smalley took the magazine to Chicago in an attempt to make it a national publication under the name of *Smalley's Magazine*. The venture failed, however, and the magazine suspended publication in 1904.

Eugene Smalley was a man of varied interests. He was a member, and for many years president, of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, and he belonged to the G.A.R. and the Sons of the American Revolution. He was actively interested in state politics, particularly the Republican party. He knew personally at least seven presidents, and he was a trusted personal friend

of both Hayes and Garfield. His newspaper work brought him into close contact with many of the men who organized the Republican party and served as its leaders for its first thirty years. As a political correspondent, Smalley traveled in nearly every state in the Union, and on some occasions he ascended the stump in support of the party. He wrote extensively on politics, publishing *The Republican Manual* (1880), and a *History of the Republican Party* (1884) to which in 1896 he added a *Political History of Minnesota from a Republican Point of View*. Among his other writings was an appendix to the *Encyclopedia Britannica on American Journalism* (1884). Smalley also revised and rewrote Henry J. Winser's guidebook to *The Great Northwest* (1886).

How many people settled on Northern Pacific lands as a result of Smalley's work in the *Northwest Magazine* can only be surmised. His success, however, is reflected in that of the Northern Pacific's whole campaign of advertising. One has only to view that railroad and the region it serves today to find evidence that its advertising program was successful, and that its propaganda paid.

Although they cannot be reduced to figures, the results attained by the *Northwest Magazine* doubtless far surpassed the fondest hopes of the railroad officials who launched the project. After his death at the close of the century, Smalley's personal success was summed up in fitting manner by a colleague. "His magazine was read everywhere, and the good it accomplished received almost universal acknowledgement," the writer declared.<sup>9</sup> He undoubtedly expressed also the sentiments of the thousands who received their first impressions of the Northwest and its wealth from Eugene Smalley's periodical.

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<sup>7</sup> Victor H. Smalley, in *Rowell's American Newspaper Directory*, 1903, p. 507.

<sup>8</sup> *Rowell's American Newspaper Directory*, 1899, p. 520.

<sup>9</sup> *Northwest Magazine*, January, 1900, p. 34.



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