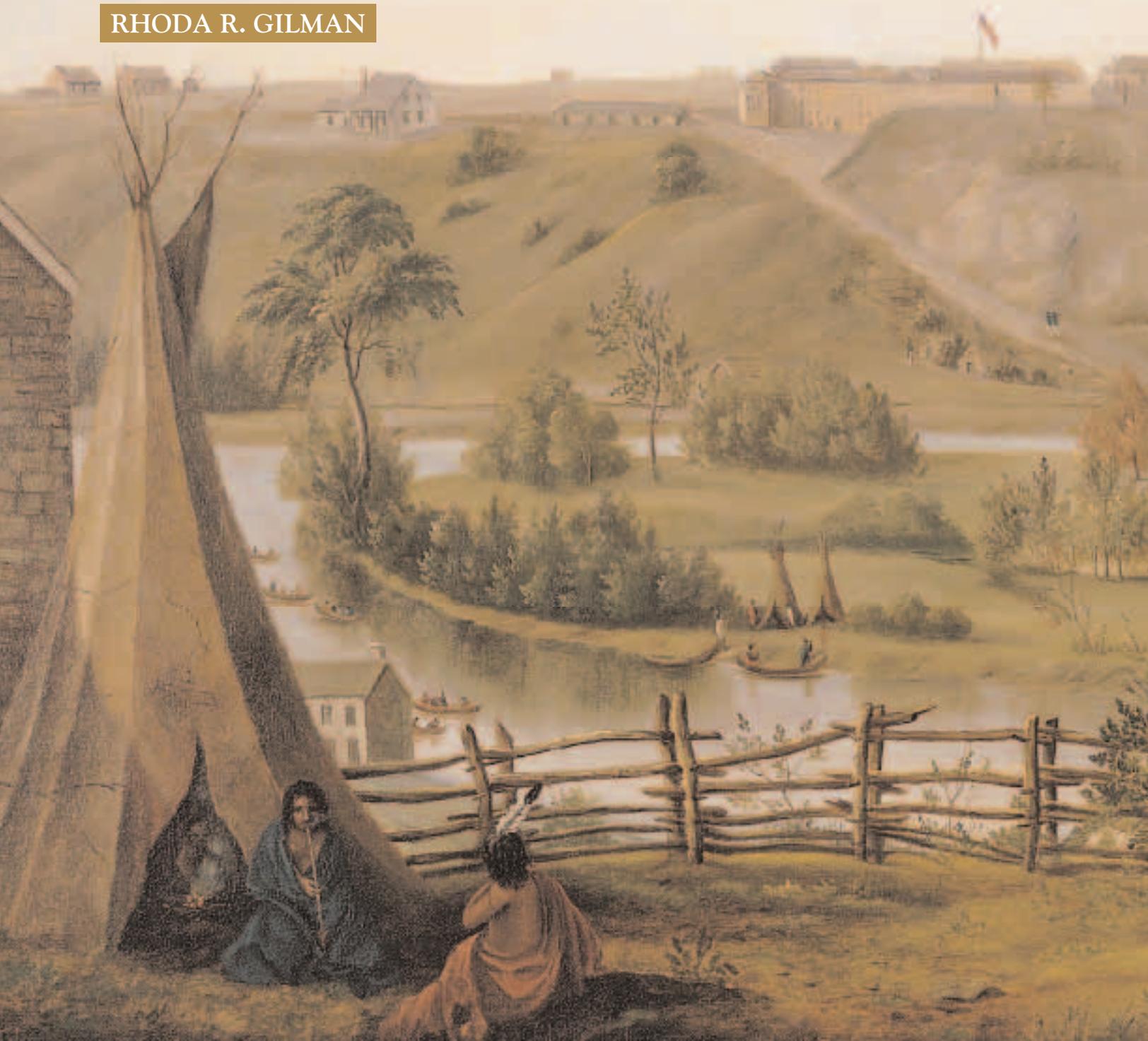


TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE

How Minnesota Became the 32nd S

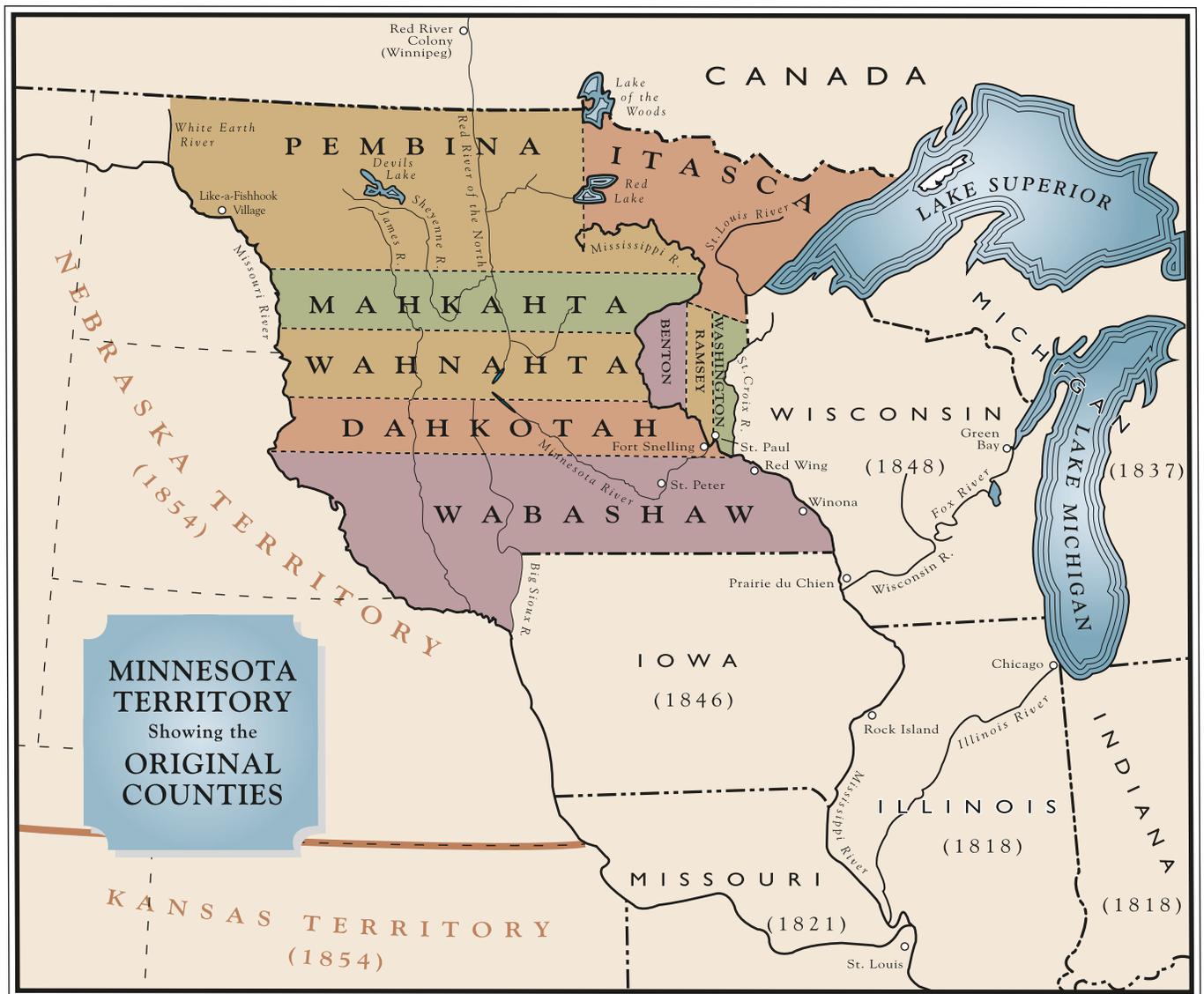
RHODA R. GILMAN



The prairies and forests, the lakes and watersheds that surround the upper reaches of the Mississippi and Red Rivers, and the head of Lake Superior have been known and occupied by men and women for more than 10,000 years. During that span, the human and natural landscapes have been reworked several times by waves of climatic and cultural change. But none was swifter than the change that went into high gear as boundaries were drawn on a map and the region was named “Minnesota.” That event occurred in March 1849, when a bill

tate

Indian people at Mendota and soldiers across the Minnesota River at the dawn of the territorial era, portrayed in Henry Lewis's *Fort Snelling*, oil on canvas, about 1850



creating the new territory was passed by the U.S. Senate and signed by President James K. Polk.¹

For most Americans, whether their sense of history stems from the classroom or from Disneyland, 1849 is associated with the California gold rush. The fact that Minnesota came into being at the same time is not entirely unconnected. Both events were expressions of the burst of expansion that transformed the United States in the 1840s. As late as 1842, the Senate had seriously considered but ultimately rejected a treaty with the Dakota nation that would have created a permanent island of Indian residence and government in the region that was later to become southern Minnesota. The treaty promised the Dakota and other northern tribes that white immigrants would be excluded from the territory and that, after a short period of settled living, Indian people there would be granted United States citizenship along with their own territorial and,

ultimately, state government. The measure was urged by the war department, recommended by the president, and vigorously supported by Henry H. Sibley, the local representative of the American Fur Company.² Yet less than a decade later, Sibley was lobbying just as hard to organize the same region as a territory for European-American settlers instead. What had happened?

The seven years between 1842 and 1849 saw the United States assume continent-wide dominance as its “manifest destiny.” A war upon Mexico was concluded in February 1848 with the taking of that country’s northern frontier from Texas to California. Later in the same year, Oregon Territory was formed from a region that until 1844 had been jointly occupied with Britain. Thus, the entire configuration of the nation had changed, both on maps and in the minds of its citizens. No longer was the Mississippi River some sort of ultimate boundary. Linking the East Coast to the Far West

had become a national priority, and the idea of placing between them a state that might differ in race and culture from others in the American republic—an idea never accepted by Congress—became unthinkable.

The 1840s had also seen the creation of two new states bordering the upper Mississippi region—Iowa in 1846 and Wisconsin in 1848. What was left of the two territories from which they had been carved straddled the headwaters of the great river and reached west to the Missouri River and north to the British possessions. Most of the land still belonged to the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes, and the scattered white population of traders, missionaries, government agents, and a few lumberjacks was far from the minimum of 5,000 required for territorial status—but the logic of national expansion called for the area to be organized immediately.

No one understood that fact more clearly than Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The “Little Giant” of Illinois was already stepping into the large shoes being vacated by the aging champions of national unity, Henry Clay of Kentucky and Lewis Cass of Michigan. Cass, who as governor of Michigan Territory had presided over the upper Mississippi country for 17 years, had visited the river’s headwaters, and had left his name on one of its lakes, was the Democratic candidate for president in 1848. During the campaign he addressed the divisive issue of whether slavery would be extended across the continent by advocating local option, or “popular sovereignty.” Although Cass’s loss to the Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor, was sealed in part by the upstart Free Soilers, whose antislavery platform foreshadowed the tensions that lay ahead, his doctrine of popular sovereignty was adopted by the more charismatic Douglas. The Illinois senator looked to the swelling population of the West along with the powerful forces of economic growth, corporate organization, and outward expansion to counteract the conflict over human slavery.³

Like some other western statesmen, Douglas read destiny in the geography of the upper Mississippi region. The river already provided the country with a thousand-mile channel uniting North and South. At the head of steamboat navigation, the tiny hamlet of St. Paul was nourished by a growing commerce that



Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, who championed the creation of Minnesota Territory

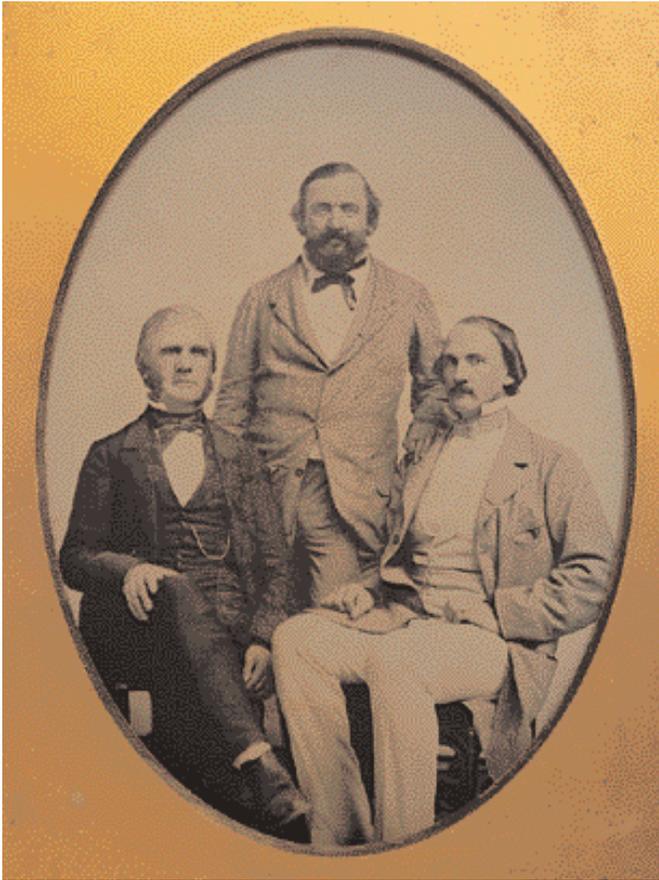
rolled over oxcart trails from the isolated British settlements on the Red River. From there it was not hard to chart the course of American empire across the far-flung private domain of the Hudson’s Bay Company to the 54th parallel, where Russian claims began.⁴ Moreover, the head of Lake Superior, little more than 100 miles from St. Paul, would eventually give deep-water access to the heart of the continent and be the logical terminus for a transcontinental railroad.

As early as 1846, Douglas, then a congressman, had prevented Iowa from extending its state line north to include the Fort Snelling area and the Falls of St. Anthony. Again in 1847, while Wisconsin struggled toward statehood, he reined in

efforts from politicians in Madison to take in St. Paul and the falls by supporting a bill for the organization of “Minnesota” Territory. It was tabled, but he revived it again in 1848, for he could see that if the small nucleus of American population growing at the head of river navigation were to be annexed by another state, the remaining northern reaches of the country extending to the British boundary would have little hope of organized government for years to come.⁵

For the time being, economic control on the upper Mississippi lay with a network of traders that was anchored during the 1840s by the firm of Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Company of St. Louis. They included Hercules L. Dousman at Prairie du Chien, his associate, a mercurial newcomer to the Indian trade named Henry M. Rice, and Sibley at Mendota. Formerly Dousman’s partner, Sibley by 1846 was working independently with Chouteau, both as trader and land agent. His polish, education, and impeccable social and political connections gave him a recognized claim to leadership. Through a post operated by Norman W. Kittson at Pembina on the British border, he was fast developing a business in buffalo hides from the western plains and smuggled furs from the Hudson’s Bay Company preserve.⁶

The late 1840s saw this group alternately challenged and supported by lumbermen moving from Maine and New Hampshire into the rich pine stands of the St. Croix valley, which had been ceded in 1837 by the Ojibwe and Dakota. With financial backing from the northeastern



Territorial powers (from right) Henry Sibley, Joseph Rolette Jr. (standing), and unidentified man, possibly Franklin Steele, photographed by Mathew Brady in his Washington, D. C., studio, about 1857

states, these New Englanders began rafting logs down the Mississippi and building sawmills at places like Marine Mills and Stillwater. A personal link between the two groups was Franklin Steele, brother-in-law and business associate of Sibley. Steele owned the key waterpower site at the Falls of St. Anthony, where he built the first sawmill and started producing lumber in September 1848.

Both traders and lumbermen were eager for the jobs, patronage, and wider influence that would accompany a new territory. With the support of Douglas, the Wisconsin boundary was eventually placed at the St. Croix River. Again in 1849 the Illinois senator played a key role at the last moment, saving the bill creating Minnesota Territory from a congressional deadlock over whether the outgoing Democratic or incoming Whig administration would appoint the territorial officers.

Those officers were ultimately named by the new president. Chief among them was the governor, Alexander Ramsey, a former Whig congressman from Pennsylvania. Sibley had already been sent to Washington by a quasilegal election held in 1848 and was confirmed as the territory's congressional delegate in August 1849. Legislators, elected at the same time, held their first session at a St. Paul hotel early in September.

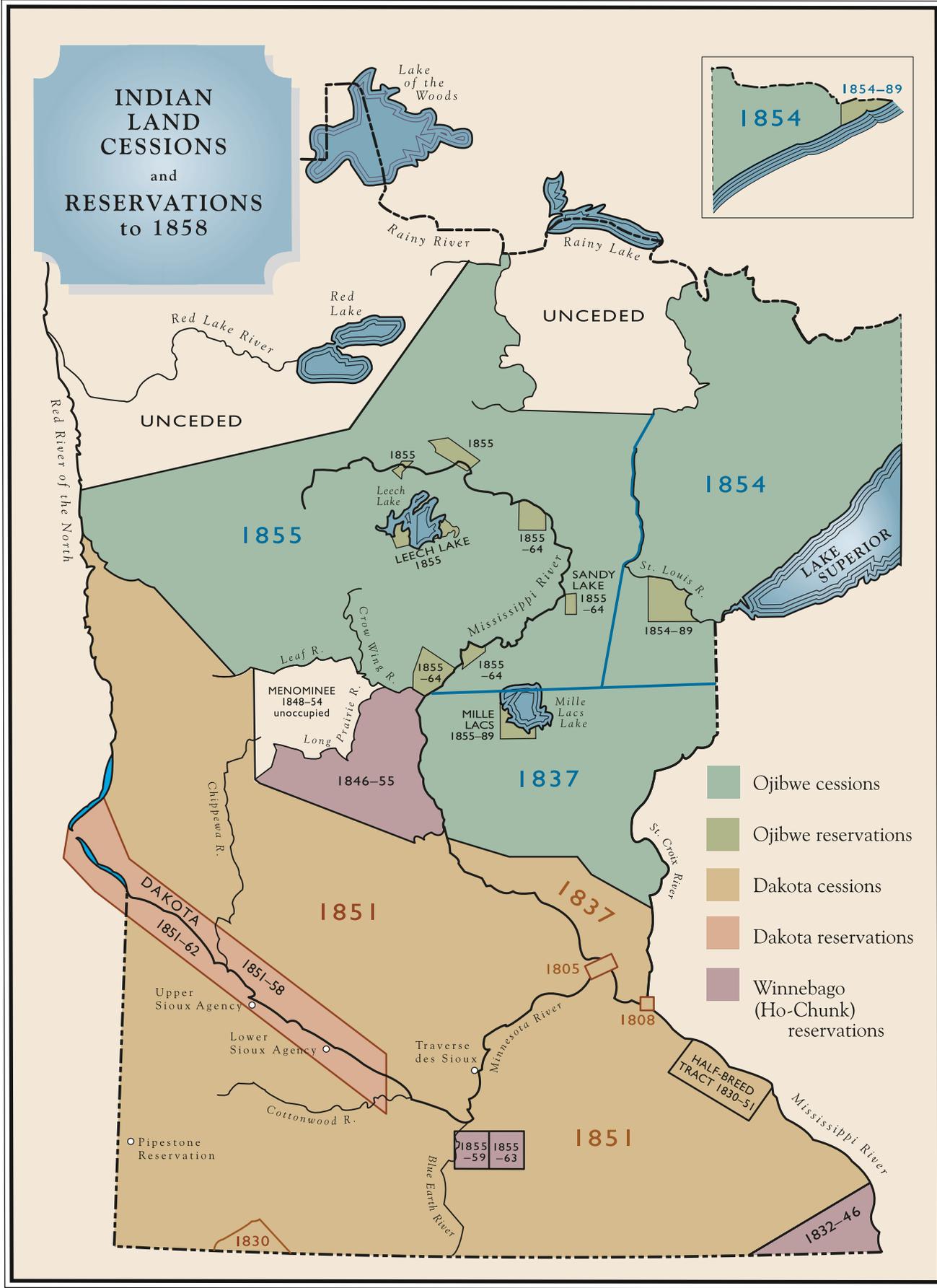
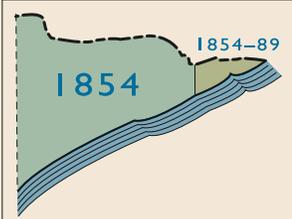
WITH THE TERRITORY of 166,000 square miles organized, the prime issues became land and people. A census taken in the summer of 1849 recorded the resident Euro-American population as 4,535. Probably as many as one-third of those were of mixed Indian and European ancestry, including nearly everyone in the widely scattered settlement formed by the descendants of French traders and voyageurs around Pembina. Census takers listed these métis people as white, provided they dressed and lived in European fashion. The Indian population can only be guessed at. Ramsey's estimate was some 25,000—none, of course, considered citizens or voters.

While nearly half the population counted in the census was concentrated in the three towns of St. Paul, Stillwater, and St. Anthony, Indian people were spread widely. On the banks of the Missouri at the far western edge of the territory, more than 400 miles from St. Paul, the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes lived together in an earth-lodge village, Like-a-Fishhook, that was without much question the largest in the territory. Its estimated population of about 700 outnumbered Stillwater and probably surpassed St. Paul.⁷

Not for long, however, was this true. Creation of the new territory turned St. Paul into a feverish little boom town. The population more than doubled within a year, four newspapers appeared, and shanties sprouted like mushrooms along the Mississippi River bluff. Nevertheless, all of the huge territory—except the narrow triangle of land between the St. Croix and the Mississippi Rivers and south of a line running through Lake Mille Lacs—was still Indian country. No treaties of purchase for the rest of the territory had yet been signed. Facing St. Paul across and just down the Mississippi lay the Dakota town of Kaposia, a daily reminder of the fundamental barrier that stood in the way of new immigration.

The human face of that barrier was represented by three tribes: the Dakota or Sioux of southern Minnesota, the Ojibwe or Chippewa to the north, and the Ho-Chunk or Winnebago, who had been moved from their home in central Wisconsin to northern Iowa, promised a place in central Minnesota in 1846, and settled on land bought in 1847 from the Ojibwe. All three

INDIAN LAND CESSIONS and RESERVATIONS to 1858



- Ojibwe cessions
- Ojibwe reservations
- Dakota cessions
- Dakota reservations
- Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) reservations

groups were acquainted with European ways through traders who had lived and married among them for a century. More recently they had dealt with Christian missionaries and the U.S. Army. All three had experienced the fickleness of the Great Father in Washington and the unreliability of his many agents. Their principal leaders—Little Crow and Wabasha of the Dakota, Hole-in-the-Day and Flat Mouth among the Ojibwe, and Winneshiek of the Ho-Chunk—were canny and wary, yet keenly conscious of the power behind the migrating hordes that were poised to overrun their land.

In his inaugural address to the first legislature, Governor Ramsey targeted purchase of southern Minnesota from the Dakota tribe as the prime need of the new territory. A memorial on the subject was duly sent to Congress, and for the next three years that goal was the central preoccupation of Minnesota citizens. The key to achieving it peacefully was the trading establishment led by Sibley, who had lived and worked for nearly 20 years among the Dakota. Allied with him were powerful mixed-blood families like the Faribaults and Renvilles. Without support from these people and their widespread networks of kin among the four bands of the tribe, there was little hope for getting agreement to a treaty.

It was in July 1851 that Ramsey and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea, acting as federal treaty negotiators, met with the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands at Traverse des Sioux, near present-day St. Peter. On the same spot, just 10 years earlier, these Dakota groups had agreed immediately to the treaty that would have created an all-Indian territory. But the Great Father had changed his mind, and in 1851 they were faced with something far different. In the meantime there had been lean years, and some of the people were close to starvation while others had survived only on credit from traders.⁸

The United States now proposed to take all their land as far west as Lake Traverse and the Big Sioux River for its own citizens. When the bargaining was finished, the two bands found themselves confined to a strip of country extending 10 miles on each side of the Minnesota River above the Yellow Medicine River. Below that, another 20-mile-wide strip was reserved for the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute bands, with whom a separate treaty would be made.

For their land they were to be paid about 7.5 cents an acre. Most of the sum would be invested and its interest yield an annuity for 50 years. Some \$30,000 was to be spent immediately on schools, mills, blacksmith shops, and other government services, while the remaining \$275,000 would be given to the chiefs, who might then pay the debts members of the tribe owed



the traders. This was a feature of nearly every Indian treaty, despite mandates to the contrary often made by Congress in an effort to prevent fraudulent claims. To ensure collection, traders represented at Traverse des Sioux drew up a document listing the debts and secured the signature of each Indian headman as he left the treaty table.

Debate raged later as to whether the Dakota understood the traders' paper, and the procedure gave rise to complaints of fraud and favoritism from other traders.



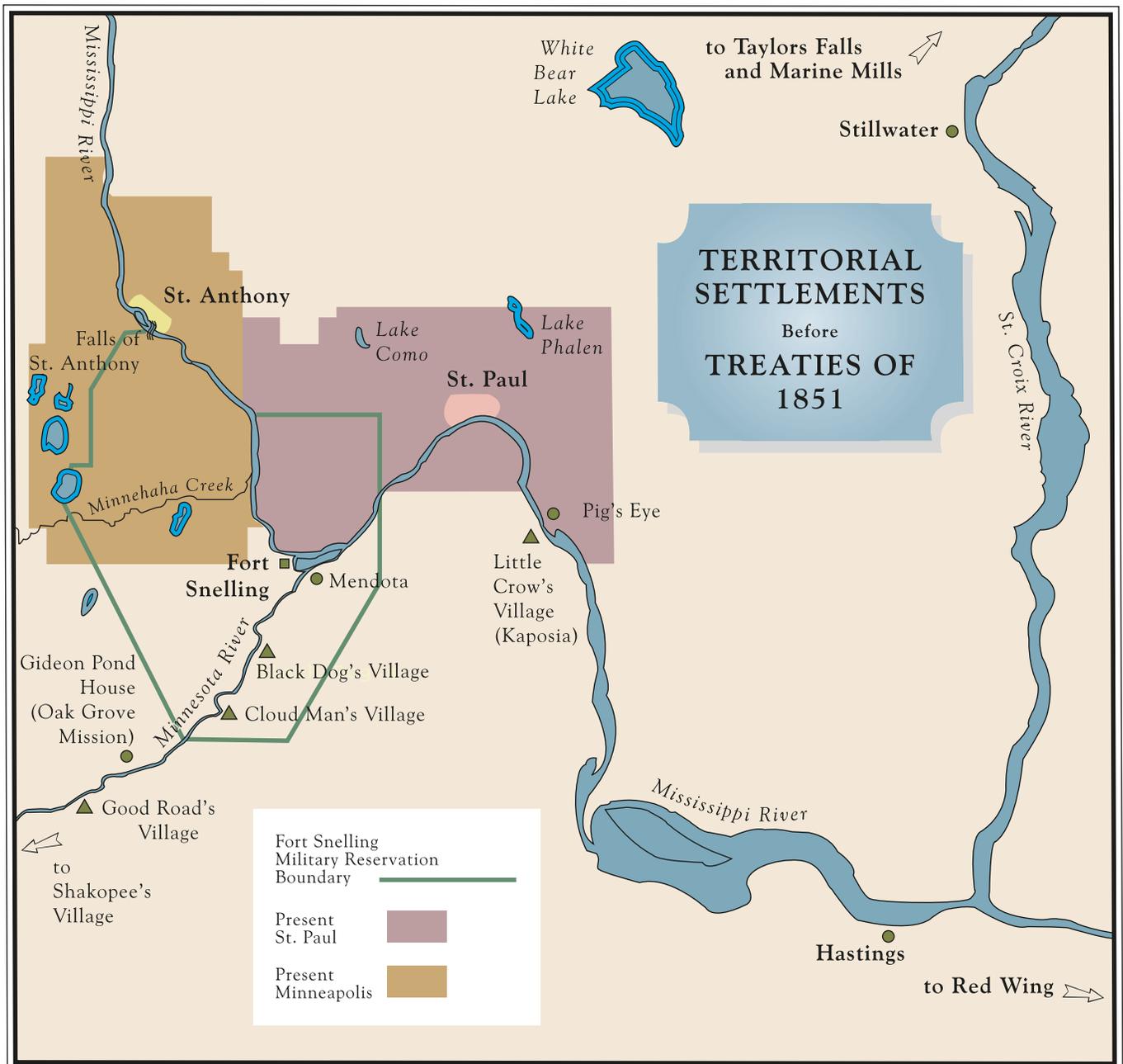
Those charges led to a congressional investigation that probed the close working relationship between Ramsey and Sibley but found no malfeasance. Most of the small traders who received money as a result of the treaty were deeply in debt to Sibley, who in turn owed nearly all of what he collected to the Chouteau company. Thus, little of the payment stayed in Minnesota.

Meanwhile a separate treaty had been signed at Mendota in August 1851 with the Mdewakanton and Wahpekute. Having already received some treaty money

Dakota leaders lined up to make their signature marks in Francis D. Millet's oil, *The Treaty of Traverse des Sioux*, painted in 1905 from sketches that artist Frank B. Mayer had made at the signing in 1851

from ceding their land east of the Mississippi, the Mdewakanton were less hungry and desperate than the others. They were also more determined and suspicious, since they had learned from experience that government payments were always late and that many promises were never kept—facts that Little Crow repeatedly pointed out. But there was nothing they could do except protest. They were trapped by the fact that the western bands had already given in.

LOBBYING THE TREATIES through Congress was again the work of Sibley, this time in his role as territorial delegate. It was a bitter struggle. Southern diehards who opposed national expansion to the north succeeded in amending the documents in a way that they hoped the Indians would reject. One major change was to strike out the provision for a reservation along the Minnesota River and to leave the Dakota with nowhere to go except some unnamed place that the president might designate. The



Dakota were indeed angered. But Ramsey assured them that the president would name the valley of the Minnesota River as their permanent home, and the revised treaties were reluctantly accepted in the fall of 1852.

During the same years the Indian barrier to the north was also under attack. Ironically, this began with an effort to move more Ojibwe into Minnesota Territory. In 1837 and 1842 they had ceded all of their land in northern Wisconsin, but in both cases treaty negotiators had assured the people that they would not have to move for several generations, if ever. What the United States wanted was only access to timber and minerals. By February, 1850, however, the Great Father had changed his mind, and all of them were told to relocate west of the Mississippi. Governor Ramsey of Minnesota was to take charge of the process.⁹

Little Crow at the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, an 1895 oil portrait by Frank B. Mayer based on his 1851 sketch



Ramsey planned to put most of them in the neighborhood of Leech Lake, still far from the edge of settlement and away from increasing commerce on Lake Superior. The U.S. Indian agency would be moved from La Pointe, in northern Wisconsin, and the most immediate change he foresaw would be more government business, jobs, and money flowing through St. Paul to northern Minnesota.

He took no steps, however, to get agreement from the Ojibwe bands already living around the Mississippi headwaters, and when they objected, the new location was changed to Sandy Lake. Forcing the Wisconsin bands to move was thought to be simple: their annuities, including both money and supplies, would be paid only at Sandy Lake, and any who refused to travel there would receive none.

During the next three years a tangled and tragic tale, marked by incompetence, lies, and callousness to human suffering on the part of both Ramsey and Indian agent John M. Watrous ended in the death of between two and four hundred Ojibwe. They were saved further loss from starvation, exposure, and disease when the election of 1852 sent Democrat Franklin Pierce to the White House. The new administration replaced Ramsey and Watrous with Democratic appointees. Possibly influenced by appeals from the Ojibwe leader Buffalo who with a few others traveled illegally to Washington, the president also cancelled the policy of removal.

Relieved and thankful, the Ojibwe bands around Lake Superior willingly signed a new treaty in 1854. In return for permanent, designated reservations in their own country they gave up the Minnesota Arrowhead, the northeasternmost region of the territory, which was already suspected to contain important mineral wealth. Also included in this treaty was the north bank of the St. Louis River at its mouth, where a sheltered deep-water port provided the key to transportation and commercial expansion at the head of Lake Superior. In 1855 still another section of the barrier against American occupation fell, when the Ojibwe



**Territorial Governor
Alexander Ramsey**



Silver peace medal (reverse side), dated 1853 and presented to Ojibwe chief Hole-in-the-Day II during the administration of President Franklin Pierce

bands around the Mississippi headwaters agreed to a similar arrangement and ceded most of north-central Minnesota. The same year saw the Ho-Chunk again moved, this time to a small reservation in the Blue Earth River valley of southern Minnesota.

WITH THE SIGNING of these treaties a subtle but profound change had already taken place. Prairie and oak openings had become acres; forests had become timber stands; tumbling rivers had become water rights. A world of natural features once invested with mystery and power of their own had become resources for human manipulation. Unlike the Dakota, the Ojibwe had a generation yet ahead of them to accommodate to this transformation. In southern Minnesota, change came more quickly.

To nineteenth-century Americans, too, land had an almost holy quality. The sacred element they saw was not the land itself, with its ancient layers of interwoven plant and animal life, but the dream of what human labor could produce from it. In the words of one anonymous midcentury poet:

The land is the gift of bounteous God,
And to labor his word commands;
Yet millions of hands want acres,
And millions of acres want hands.¹⁰

Even more alluring and powerful than the natural bounty of land was the meteoric rise in its value as pop-

ulation poured into an area. A tract bought from Indian people for 7.5 cents and resold by the government to its own citizens for \$1.25 might be worth hundreds if platted as a town lot or even thousands if it became the business block of a rising city. Successive waves of land speculation built great fortunes and fueled the U.S. economy through much of the nineteenth century, and one of them was cresting just at the time Minnesota became a territory.

Not until February 1853 did the purchase of southern Minnesota from the Dakota become official, and settlement was not legal there until a year and a half later. But the tide would not be held back. As soon as the signing of the treaties was announced late in 1852, a flood of trespassers surged onto Indian land. As at Red Wing in the spring of 1853, the new owners hastened the departure of lingering Dakota neighbors by torching bark houses that stood in their way.

They came on overcrowded steamboats or they walked across Illinois and Wisconsin beside covered wagons—men, women, and children, cattle, pigs, and other livestock. Many were newcomers from Sweden, Germany, Ireland, and other north European countries. Some came as extended families and others accompanied neighbors from the Old Country. Along with their domestic animals they brought seed to replace the native prairie grasses with crops that had fed their ancestors in Europe. Thus, not only the human face but the underlying biological patterns of Minnesota began to change immediately. By 1854 the Euro-American population of the territory was more than 30,000, and just three years later it topped 150,000. Among people over 15 years of age counted in the U.S. census of 1850, white men had outnumbered white women by more than two to one, but by 1860 the ratio was almost one to one.¹¹

A sizable number of these people congregated in the new towns that sprang up along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers: Carver, Henderson, Mankato, Winona, Wabasha, Read's Landing, Red Wing, Hastings, St. Anthony Falls, and eventually Minneapolis, after the Fort Snelling military reservation was opened to land claims in 1855. The mainstays of this urban frontier were sawmills and river commerce. Farms in the country behind them were still small, producing little more than subsistence crops, and roads to market were few. So throughout the territorial years Minnesota imported food from downriver. Its principal exports remained lumber, hides, and furs.

During these years there was constant agitation for relaxing federal land law, which required that land be surveyed before it could be claimed. In 1854 this was changed for Minnesota to allow pre-emption

(registering of a claim) on unsurveyed land. Such claims could be “proved up” later. The great fear of many settlers was that a land auction would be declared before they had the money to buy their claims, and politicians were kept busy working to have such sales postponed. In 1862 the Homestead Act ended this system, but during Minnesota’s territorial years grassroots claim associations, which were prepared to defend the rights of vulnerable settlers, were common. So also were scores of “paper towns” platted and promoted in hopes of ballooning land values that were never realized. Along with these came land speculators and loan sharks like Jason C. Easton of Chatfield, who advertised that he made and brokered loans, collected on bad debts, paid taxes, examined titles, and above all located and dealt in military-bounty land warrants. Those certificates for the purchase of government land became a bonanza for speculators after 1855, when Congress gave them as a bonus to Mexican War veterans.¹²

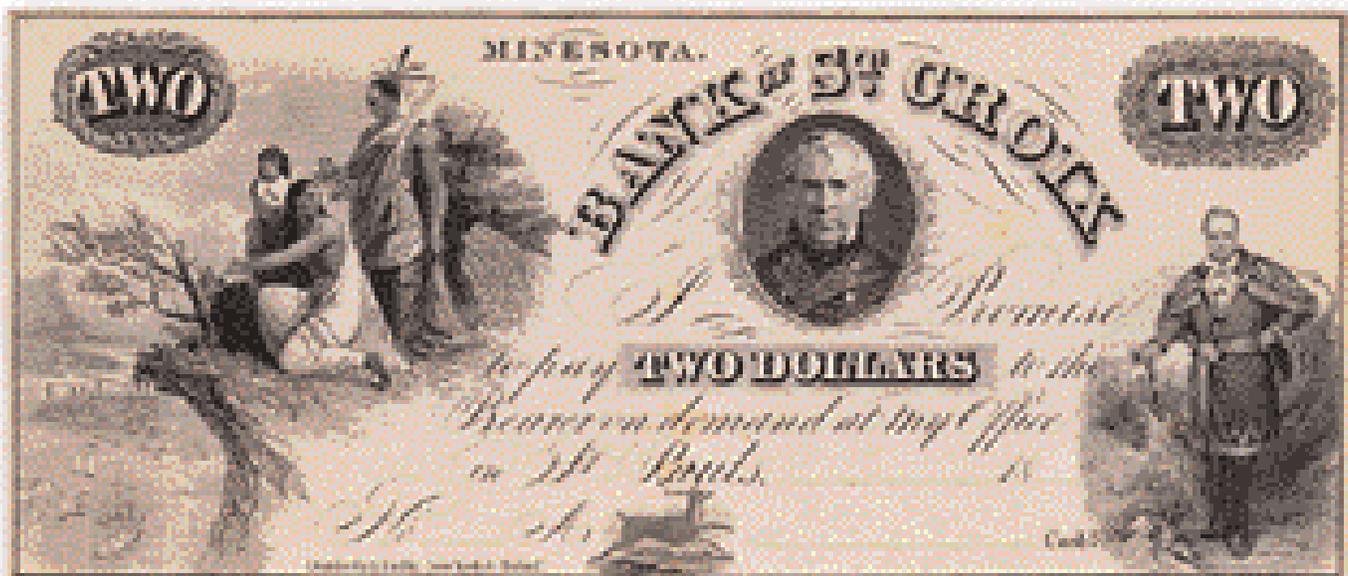
DESPITE GROWING ETHNIC DIVERSITY, the economic, cultural, and political leadership of the territory was held firmly by Anglo-Americans, and the influence of those from northeastern states earned Minnesota the nickname “New England of the West.” Laws and institutions embodied that influence. At its first session in 1849, the legislature passed an expansive common-school act, and nine years later 72 school districts offered free education to anyone between the ages of

four and twenty-one. The same legislators chartered a university and proclaimed their keen sense of destiny by creating a historical society. While the university remained a dream for many years, church bodies moved ahead at once to supply the growing need for training schoolteachers and ministers. On the town square of Red Wing in 1856 Hamline University laid stone foundations for the first four-year college west of the Mississippi. The next year it opened its doors, admitting women as well as men. Other than elementary teaching, there was little paid employment for women in the territory, but they undertook social service and nursing when the Sisters of St. Joseph founded St. Paul’s first hospital after a cholera epidemic in 1854.¹³

A literate population demanded newspapers, and by 1858 more than 80 had been started in the territory. From their print shops early editors like James M. Goodhue of the *Minnesota Pioneer* and David Olmsted of the *Minnesota Democrat*, both in St. Paul, and Charles G. Ames of the St. Anthony Falls *Minnesota Republican* acted as territorial boosters and opinion makers. In 1857 the first woman’s voice was heard, when Jane Grey Swisshelm issued the controversial *St. Cloud Visiter* to champion abolition and women’s rights.

IN POLITICS IT WAS A TIME when party lines were shifting all across the nation in response to rising sectional tensions. This was reflected in Minnesota, where parties existed in name only through most of the territorial

Bank note from 1849, a rare surviving example of the territory’s fledgling economy



years. Although replaced as governor by Democrat Willis A. Gorman in 1853, Ramsey remained a power, far outweighing the influence of the few other local Whigs. As his party began to disintegrate he played a waiting game, refusing to commit to the new Minnesota Republican Party, organized in 1855, until it gained unmistakable momentum. Sibley, a moderate Democrat, had strong personal and political ties to Cass and Douglas but, following the nonpartisan model set by Cass in Michigan Territory, he maintained local allies in all camps. Sibley's chief rival, Henry M. Rice, with whom he had quarreled in business and continued to quarrel in politics, was nonpartisan in his own way. As the national Democratic Party threatened to split between northern and southern wings, Rice, a skilled lobbyist and office-seeker, remained a friend of whoever was in power. With unflinching charm and cheerful cynicism, he brought the spoils from Washington back to Minnesota.

A year after Minnesota emerged as a political entity, Cass, from his position as senior statesman and senator from Michigan, stitched together the patchwork of agreements known as the Compromise of 1850. It was

made possible by the pressure of economic interests from both North and South. With an immediate confrontation over slavery postponed, Douglas and others turned to an emerging network of corporate enterprise that they hoped would support a political coalition powerful enough to hold the nation back from war.

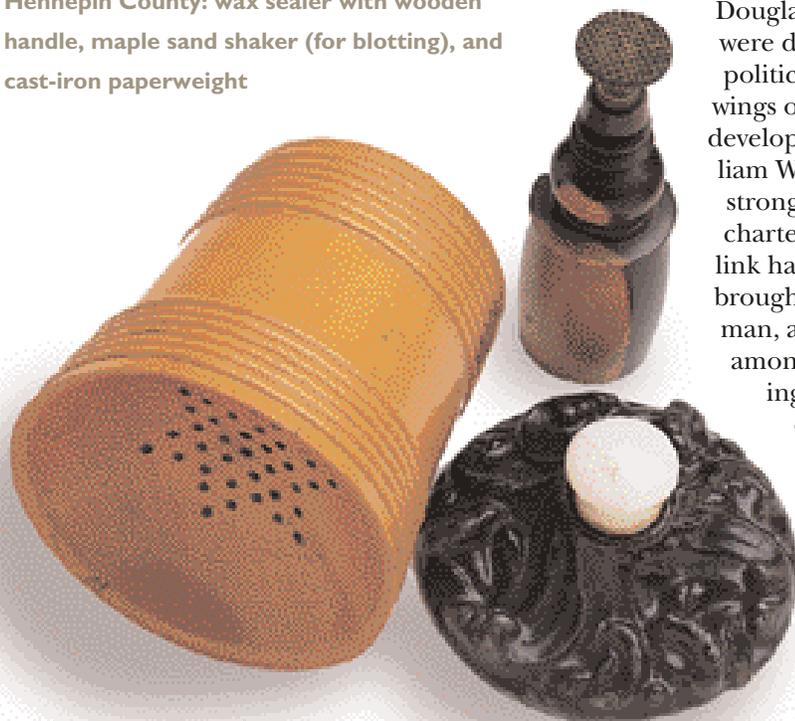
This new force rode on the steel rails that were even then transforming the country by shrinking time and distance. Douglas himself had performed a political coup in 1850 when he secured to the state of Illinois the first major grant of federal land for purposes of railroad building. He envisioned an expanding web, knitting the country together, with the Illinois Central system at its heart. Southern extensions would reach into Texas, and its northern anchor would be a new city named Superior at the head of the big lake.¹⁴

That city, platted in 1853 on the Wisconsin side of the St. Louis River, further expressed the continental dreams that had gone into the making of Minnesota Territory. A possible route for a transcontinental railroad west from Lake Superior was even then being explored by the U.S. Army. The Sault Canal, already under construction, would bring shipping from the lower lakes to the head of Lake Superior within two years. But the most immediate step would be building a rail line that would link the lake with St. Paul and extend on through Minnesota and Iowa where it would connect with a branch of the Illinois Central.

Then, as now, money ruled politics. In accord with Douglas's vision, shares in the far northern boom town were distributed to a host of influential Democratic politicians from both the southern and northern wings of the party, while much of the capital for its development came from the deep pockets of William W. Corcoran, a Washington-based financier with strong southern sympathies. In Minnesota, where the charter and a land grant for the proposed railroad link had to originate, all political factions were brought to the table, including Sibley, Ramsey, Gorman, and others less prominent. Henry Rice was among the first and most closely involved. After trying to make his own claims on the site of the town of Superior, he had come to terms with the agents of Douglas and was actively promoting the railroad scheme.

Rice had succeeded Sibley as Minnesota's territorial delegate in 1853, and a temporary truce prevailed between them. Then, early in 1854, lobbyists from the Illinois Central company strong-armed the territorial legislature into passing the charter of the new Minnesota and North

Desk set used in the 1856 territorial legislature by Representative Thomas W. Pierce of Richfield, Hennepin County: wax sealer with wooden handle, maple sand shaker (for blotting), and cast-iron paperweight



Western Railroad Company, with a provision that any land grant made to Minnesota for railroad building would automatically go to that company. Sibley became increasingly cool, and Congress also proved skittish about such a restrictive arrangement. One land-grant bill introduced by Rice was defeated.

As the price of his support for a second attempt, Sibley demanded the right to draw up the bill himself. In doing so, he worded it carefully so that the Minnesota and North Western would not be eligible to receive the grant. That version was successful in Congress, but jubilation in Minnesota came to a screeching halt when it was found that the law's wording had been altered to favor the company some time between its passage by the House of Representatives and its signing by the president. The resulting scandal sunk both the land grant and the Minnesota and North Western.

Thus, the steel rails that might have stretched from St. Paul to Superior in 1855 were not laid until 1870, and the whole railroad era in Minnesota was delayed beyond the end of the territorial years. Although Minnesota's isolation during the months when the Mississippi was frozen had been partially overcome by government roads and stagecoach lines established in the territorial years, the need for all-weather transportation remained, and the political scheming and burning desire for a share in the economic bonanza promised by railroads played an important role in the rush toward statehood.

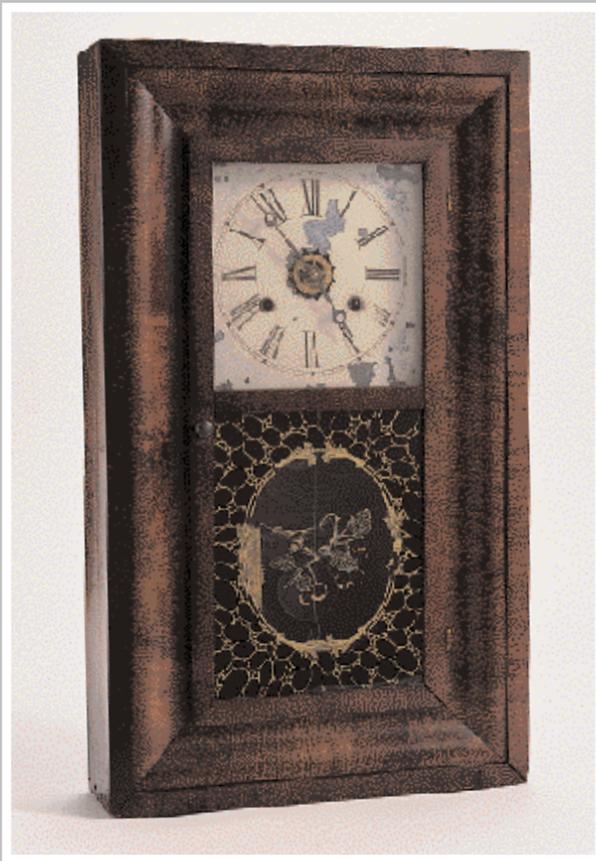
TIME WAS RUNNING OUT for the promoters of Superior and the Illinois Central, for in 1857 the wave of prosperity that had supported the northwest region's phenomenal growth crashed on the rocks of financial panic. Money became tight throughout the country and almost nonexistent in Minnesota; land values collapsed, and western settlement slowed. Superior shrank into a frontier outpost, and even exuberant St. Paul was thrown into the doldrums for several years.

For the political vision of Illinois's Little Giant, time had also run out. Far from defusing the slavery issue, the doctrine of popular sovereignty, embodied in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, had brought outright warfare to the territory of Kansas. The forces of corporate empire-building and interlocking material interests had not proved strong enough to contain those of moral outrage and cultural conflict. Thus, when Minnesota delegates gathered in the summer of 1857 to draw up a state constitution, the shadow of "Bleeding Kansas" hung over them. The flaming issues that divided them were the status of black people, both free and slave, and the new relationships implied by a recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, which held that Harriet and



Territorial delegate to Congress Henry M. Rice

TWO CENTURIES OF MINN



Thirty-hour shelf clock, made in Connecticut by E. N. Welch Manufacturing Company and brought to Minnesota Territory by Gottfried Henneberg

1650s–70s

- European explorers encounter Ojibwe and Dakota inhabitants of Minnesota region

1787

- Some Ojibwe and Dakota lands included in Northwest Territory of the U.S.

1803

- Louisiana Purchase acquires for the U.S. 828,000 square miles of Indian-occupied land between Mississippi River and Rocky Mountains

1805–06

- Zebulon M. Pike, an American army officer, explores parts of Minnesota region

1812

- Red River colony (Winnipeg) started by Lord Selkirk, a Scottish nobleman

1818

- Convention with Great Britain establishes 49th parallel as northern boundary of the U.S. from Lake of the Woods to Rocky Mountains

1819

- Fort Snelling established as northwesternmost army post on the U.S. frontier

1820s

- American fur trade peaks in Minnesota

1820

- Missouri compromise bans slavery in Louisiana Territory north of 36° 30' (southern boundary of Missouri)

1823

- First mail-carrying steamboat, based at St. Louis, reaches Fort Snelling

PostSc
GILMAN

ESOTA AND U.S. HISTORY

1834

- Missionaries arrive in Minnesota to convert Indians to Christianity

1836

- Slave Dred Scott brought to Fort Snelling by his owner, an army surgeon

1837

- First major treaties with Ojibwe and Dakota take east-central Minnesota and adjacent Wisconsin for white settlement

1839

- Pierre Parrant constructs shanty at “Pig’s Eye” (St. Paul)

1846

- Iowa admitted as 29th state
Mexican-American War begins

1847

- Harriet Bishop starts Minnesota’s first school in St. Paul

1848

- Gold discovered in California
- U.S. acquires California, the Southwest, and Rio Grande boundary area at end of war with Mexico
- Wisconsin admitted as 30th state, leaving Minnesota area without government
- Mass northern European migration to U.S. begins
- Stillwater Convention stimulates Minnesota’s drive for territorial status

1849

- Minnesota Territory organized with less than 5,000 people
- First newspapers in Minnesota published

1850

- Compromise of 1850 calms slavery controversy by permitting California to enter Union as a nonslave state, opening Utah and New Mexico Territories to slavery at statehood, prohibiting slave trade in District of Columbia, and increasing power of slave owners to retrieve runaway slaves
- First U.S. census in Minnesota shows population of 6,077

1851

- 200,000 Irish emigrate to U.S. to escape potato famine
- By treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux, the Dakota cede their land west of Mississippi River (southern and western Minnesota) to the U.S.
- St. Paul, St. Anthony (merged with Minneapolis in 1872), and Stillwater selected as sites of capital, university, and penitentiary
- Caravan of 102 Red River ox carts arrives in St. Paul

1852

- *Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota Language*, compiled by Stephen R. Riggs, Thomas S. Williamson, and Gideon and Samuel Pond, published by Smithsonian Institution

1854

- Kansas-Nebraska Act reopens slavery controversy by repealing the Missouri Compromise and allowing voters to decide the status of slavery in the two territories
- By Treaty of La Pointe, the Ojibwe cede northeastern Minnesota to the U.S.
- U.S. legalizes pre-emption, granting purchase rights to the first claimant on unsurveyed land in Minnesota and Iowa
- Rock Island Railroad excursion brings tourists and publicity to Minnesota

1855

- Mississippi, Pillager, and Winnibigoshish bands of Ojibwe cede their lands in central and northern Minnesota to the U.S.
- Minnesota’s Republican Party organized in response to formation of national party in 1854
- First bridge to span Mississippi River’s main channel anywhere along its length opens between Minneapolis and St. Anthony

1857

- National financial panic ends prosperity that has supported Minnesota Territory’s growth
- U.S. Supreme Court exacerbates slavery controversy by ruling in Dred Scott case that Scott’s residency in Minnesota Territory did not entitle him to sue for freedom
- Pre-statehood census shows territorial population of 150,037
- Democrats and Republicans hold rival constitutional conventions in anticipation of statehood
- Attempt to remove Minnesota’s capital to St. Peter

1858

- Trans-Atlantic cable connecting U.S. and England laid
- Minnesota admitted as 32nd state

1859

- Oregon admitted as 33rd state

1860

- Abraham Lincoln elected president
Southern states begin seceding

1861

- Governor Alexander Ramsey pledges President Lincoln 1,000 volunteers, making Minnesota the first state to offer troops to the Union cause

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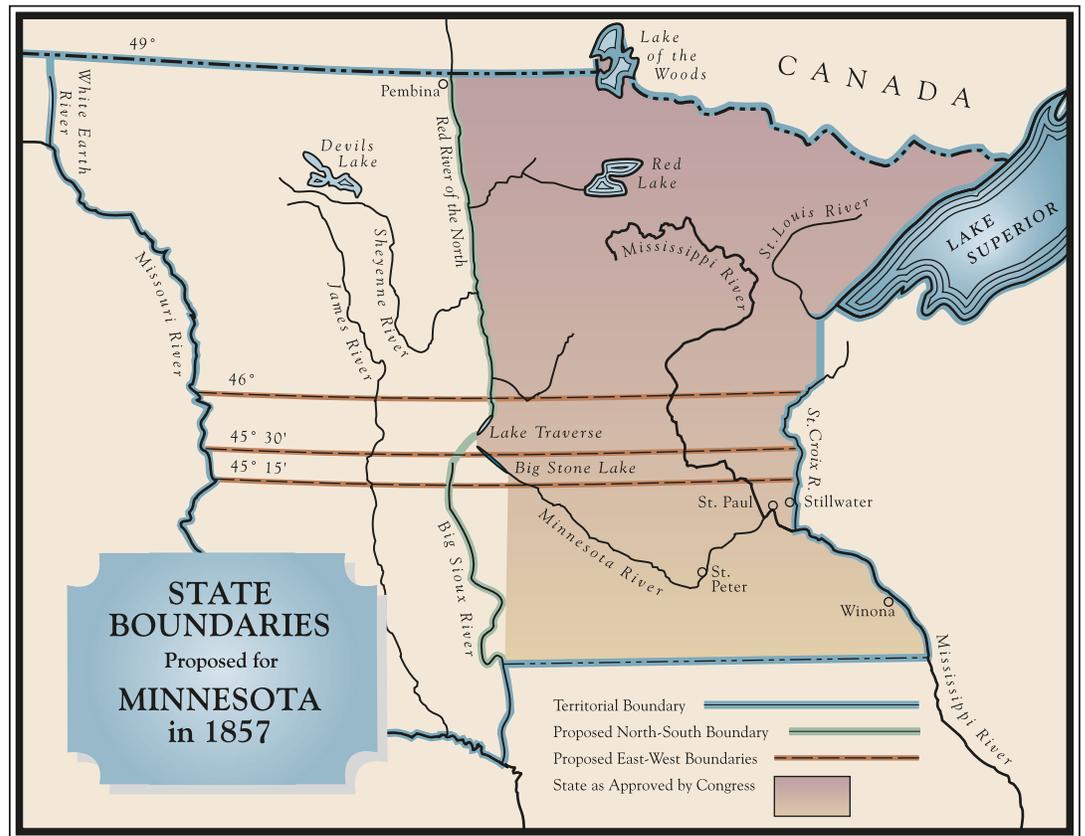
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Dred Scott were still slaves, although they had lived for years at Fort Snelling in free territory. So hot were tempers that Minnesota's Democrats and Republicans met separately and drew up different constitutions.

Local self-interest remained alive and well, nevertheless. Statehood promised not only influence in debates at the national level but control over local borrowing and taxation. A crucial incentive was the continuing fever to subsidize and promote railroads, including the prospect of a transcontinental line running through Minnesota to the Pacific. Compromise was therefore reached outside the meeting rooms, and a single constitution was at last agreed upon.

In anticipation of statehood, elections were held that pitted Sibley, who campaigned as an antislavery Democrat, in a race for governor against Ramsey, the new champion of Minnesota Republicans. Margins were narrow but Sibley prevailed, and Democrats won most of the offices. The elected legislators agreed to send Henry Rice to the U.S. Senate. Candidates for the other Senate seat were deadlocked, and the choice went to a dark horse named James Shields, a former Illinois senator and friend of Douglas. With Congress immobilized over Kansas, Minnesota's admission was held up for months, but at last, on May 11, 1858, the territory became a state.

Its shape had been hotly debated. Some had argued that Minnesota should extend west to the Missouri and north only to the 46th parallel (the latitude of present-day Little Falls). Less compelling alternatives set the northern boundary at 45° 30', 45° 15', or even farther south. Such a state would have included most of Minnesota's immigrant farmers and a majority of Republican voters. The influence of Democrats Rice and



Douglas in Washington, however, had ensured that an elongated north-south shape was specified in the enabling act passed by Congress, and this ultimately prevailed. In reaching to the British line and including the envisioned railroad route from Lake Superior westward, it reflected the continuing strength of expansionist ambitions.

As early as 1851 Ramsey had ridden to Pembina to negotiate with the Ojibwe a treaty of purchase for part of the Red River Valley. Congress had failed to ratify it, but throughout the territorial years trade with the British colony to the north had steadily increased. The first three years of statehood saw an even stronger push in that direction, with the building of a stage and wagon road to supplement the meandering oxcart trails that had served since the 1830s. A move was also made to open steamboat navigation on the Red River. These efforts were temporarily suspended, however, by the Civil and Dakota wars.¹⁵

In the interval thus created, Britain began the slow process of consolidating civil government in its sprawling North American territories and reached out to establish control over the Red River settlement and the

restive *gens libres*, or métis, of the northern plains. With this, the vision of American territorial expansion began to fade, although in Minnesota it flickered a short time longer, encouraged by the U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867 and the Riel Rebellion of 1870 in Manitoba. But although the 49th parallel remained the international line, bioregions, human communities, and economic interests continued to ignore it. Before the first railroad was opened from Minnesota to Puget Sound, Canadian citizen James J. Hill's St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad, financed by the Bank of Montreal, was carrying grain from Manitoba to the mills of Minneapolis.

THE NINE TERRITORIAL YEARS had set the stage for transforming the natural and cultural landscapes of the upper Mississippi country into those of a "civilized" Euro-American community. The undisturbed systems of plant and animal life that Americans called "wilderness" were converted into commodities subject to ownership

and exchange. A way of life that regarded them as eternal and necessary for human existence was ruthlessly eliminated. As a result, the scene was also prepared for the tragic drama that drenched Minnesota's western prairies in blood when the Dakota made a last desperate effort to take back their country in 1862.

Still in the future during the territorial years was the time when the forests would be slashed and the curves of prairie land would be regimented into rectangular fields fenced with barbed wire and deeds. Even farther in the future was the time when Minnesota could boast of being the world's breadbasket and its iron mines would build the steel infrastructure of an industrial society. And undreamed-of yet was the swelling metropolitan area that would leap even state lines to become the transportation, economic, and cultural hub of the whole region between the upper Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains. The script, however, was already in place. ❁

NOTES

¹ Unless otherwise noted, factual material for this article can be found in standard sources on Minnesota history, especially volume 1 of William W. Folwell's *A History of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1956) and Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963).

² For an account of this treaty, negotiated by Wisconsin Governor James D. Doty, see Rhoda R. Gilman, "A Northwestern Indian Territory—The Last Voice," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Western History Association, Oct. 1997, forthcoming in *Journal of the West*.

³ The most recent biography of Cass emphasizes his role as a negotiator and compromiser; see Willard C. Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1996). On Douglas, see Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴ The southern limit of Russian claims was 54°40'. As early as the election of 1844, Polk's supporters had coined the campaign slogan "54-40 or Fight," but destiny soon manifested to the south, and the U.S. and Great Britain compromised to set the northern border of Oregon at the 49th parallel.

⁵ For a full discussion of the controversy over the Wisconsin state boundary and the creation of Minnesota Territory, see William E. Lass, "Minnesota's Separation from Wisconsin: Boundary Making on the Upper Mississippi Frontier," *Minnesota History* 50 (Winter 1987): 309–20, and "The Birth of Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 55 (Summer 1997): 267–79.

⁶ Rhoda R. Gilman, "Last Days of the Upper Mississippi Fur Trade," *Minnesota History* 42 (Winter 1970): 122–40.

⁷ Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 1: 351–52; Roy W. Meyer, *The*

Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 104.

⁸ For full accounts of the 1851 treaty, see Folwell, *History of Minnesota*, 1: 266–304; Lucile M. Kane, "The Sioux Treaties and the Traders," *Minnesota History* 32 (June 1951): 65–80.

⁹ On the Ojibwe removal effort, see James A. Clifton, "Wisconsin Death March: Explaining the Extremes in the Old Northwest Indian Removal," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* 75 (1987): 1–39; Ronald N. Satz, "Chippewa Treaty Rights: The Reserved Rights of Wisconsin's Chippewa Indians in Historical Perspective," *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters* 79 (1991): 51–59.

¹⁰ "The Acres and the Hands," *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), Dec. 18, 1860.

¹¹ See United States Historical Census Data Browser, with data from 1790 to 1970, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>.

¹² Rodney C. Loehr, "Jason C. Easton, Territorial Banker," *Minnesota History* 29 (Sept. 1948): 223–30.

¹³ Sister Helen Angela Hurley, "The Sisters of St. Joseph and the Minnesota Frontier," *Minnesota History* 30 (Mar. 1949): 9.

¹⁴ For development of Superior and the political dreams and railroad schemes surrounding it, see Henry Cohen, *Business and Politics in America from the Age of Jackson to the Civil War: The Career Biography of W. W. Corcoran* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1971), 159–201. See also Johannsen, *Douglas*, 304–21, 435–37.

¹⁵ See Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman, and Deborah M. Stultz, *The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement 1820–1870* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1979).



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