

## MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

### A DANISH VISITOR OF THE SEVENTIES. I

Robert Watt, author, journalist, traveler, and theater director, was born near Aarhus, Denmark, in 1837. At the age of twenty he went to Australia, where he engaged in various occupations, living most of the time in Melbourne. He returned to Denmark in 1861 and for a time wrote for the *Illustreret tidende*; later he became traveling correspondent for *Dagbladet*. In 1866 he founded in Copenhagen the newspaper *Figaro*, which in 1868 changed its title to *Dagens nyheder* but continued under Watt's editorship until 1871.

As a traveling correspondent Watt visited France, Russia, and other countries of Europe; Egypt; and finally, in 1871, America. After his return to Denmark he continued his literary work and, among other things, made numerous translations into Danish, especially from Thackeray, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allan Poe. From 1876 to 1884 he was director of the *Folketeatret* of Copenhagen. During this period he translated for his theater a number of French plays. In the early nineties he was director of the *Kasino*. He spent the last few years of his life at Tivoli, where he died in 1894.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the material that appeared originally in the newspapers that Watt represented as a traveling correspondent was published later in a series of books, which were issued from 1865 to 1873. The book from which the following extracts have been taken appeared under the title *Fra det fjerne vesten* in 1872 and contains the reports of his travels in America in 1871. There was no indication that this book was to form part of a set; but the next year volumes two and three appeared with the general title *Hinsides Atlanterhavet*, recognizing *Fra*

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed sketch of Watt see *Dansk Biografisk Haandleksikon*, 3: 663 (Copenhagen, 1920-26).

*det fjerne vesten* as volume one of the set. Volume two had the subtitle *Vandring i New York*, and volume three, *Religiøse sekter*.

The Danes of this period were interested in America and they must have been pleased to receive first-hand information about the New World from one of their own race. There were at this time many and varied reports current in Denmark as well as in other countries of Europe concerning America. Many of Watt's fellow citizens had friends and relatives in the new land and were anxious to learn something of conditions there; and others, doubtless, were contemplating migration. Reports must have been conflicting. Encouraging reports probably were received with acclaim.

Watt seems to have been well equipped for the business of interpreting the New World to the Old. He had traveled a great deal and knew the ways of the world. He could speak the English language. His writing had descriptive qualities; he had imagination and a sense of humor; and his statements of fact were usually accurate, though he may have been too credulous and have painted the West in too rosy a hue. His own observations are given with sympathy and understanding and with unflinching good humor.

The early chapters of the volume describe Watt's journey to Liverpool, Quebec, Montreal, Ontario, Niagara Falls, and Chicago. Then follow reports of trips out from Chicago into the north woods and the region of Lake Superior. A chapter is given to the great fire in Chicago, which the author witnessed. In the portion herewith translated he describes his trip up the Mississippi to Minnesota and his impressions of St. Paul; additional chapters, in which he tells of his experiences in other parts of the state, will appear in future numbers of the magazine.

In his Danish text Watt uses certain English expressions, which he italicizes; these have been incorporated into the translation in the exact form that he uses in the original. Other

distinctly American expressions — for example, half-breed — have been translated into Danish and inclosed in quotation marks; in such cases these marks have been retained in the translation.

JACOB HODNEFIELD

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL

[Robert Watt, *Fra det fjerne vesten. Skildringer fra Amerika, 207-232*  
(Copenhagen, 1872) — Translation]

#### XVII TO MINNESOTA

St. Paul, Minnesota.

From Milwaukee to St. Paul is not a short run. I shall not speak of the months that it took the venturesome French missionaries to penetrate to the Mississippi Valley in the Northwest from their pioneer homes on the Canadian border a couple of hundred years ago; but, even now, when a person speeds over the rails almost uninterruptedly at the rate that an American express train attains, it takes nearly twenty-four hours to cross from the western shore of Lake Michigan to the capital of Minnesota — one of the newest and perhaps most interesting states in the Union.

About a hundred years after Father Hennepin, a Frenchman, had visited this place, Jonathan Carver, an American merchant, tried his luck here among the Indian tribes. He reached as far as the place where St. Paul now stands and there, on his own account, he concluded a treaty with the Nadowessie [*Sioux*] Indians, by the terms of which they ceded to him a tract of land. But the United States government took no heed of this treaty, so that he received as little profit from his audacity as his French predecessors had.<sup>2</sup> Minnesota continued to lie unoccupied, as a little-known Indian hunting ground. Not until 1837 did the government conclude a treaty with the Sioux Indians, and then the

<sup>2</sup> Carver visited the Minnesota region in 1766 and 1767, spent the winter months among the Sioux of the Minnesota Valley, and was alleged to have received a large grant of land from these Indians. See William W. Fowell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 53-64 (St. Paul, 1921).

land was opened to any pioneers who had the courage and manly fortitude to settle there.<sup>3</sup> But many years passed before immigration really began, and the history of Minnesota — named for a large and magnificent river (the name means “sky-tinted water” in the language of the Dakota Indians) which drains a considerable portion of the state — can not, as a civilized commonwealth, be said to date back more than twenty years.

This history, however, characterized by rapid progress, is most interesting and striking in spite of its brevity. In later years the cultivated area has been increased by more than three hundred per cent and the value of the state's products almost as much. In 1850 there were in all of Minnesota only a little more than five thousand inhabitants, and now there are probably about five hundred thousand scattered about the productive prairies and in the picturesque valleys with their numerous streams and lakes.<sup>4</sup> Large cities now tower on the banks of the Mississippi, and its waters furnish power for many factories. Where formerly the oxcart labored on very slowly, the railway trains now speed across country for hundreds of miles, and all this progress has taken place in the last few years. Thus has been demonstrated fully what unusual resources the young state possesses and what advantages it can offer anyone who, with an honest determination to make his way, seeks his home there. Minnesota is obviously destined to play a considerable part in the future history of America. The state is located midway between Hudson Bay and the Gulf of Mexico and midway between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Its capital rises above the Mississippi where this stream begins to be navigable and thereby connects with the South. Toward the north the *Red River* stretches like a broad highway. Toward the east commerce goes through Lake Superior and the

<sup>3</sup> Treaties were concluded in 1837 with both the Sioux and the Chippewa, but at this time the Indians ceded to the United States only the section of land between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. Much of the rest of Minnesota was opened to settlement by the treaties of 1851. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 159, and map facing p. 324.

<sup>4</sup> According to the United States census the population of Minnesota was 6,077 in 1850 and 439,706 in 1870.

St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Ocean. And when the Northern Pacific Railway, which now has been started, is ready, the state will have easy communication with the territories to the west as far as the Pacific Ocean and thence with all the trans-oceanic ports in that direction. "When this road is completed," people aver, "Duluth, our future great trade center on Lake Superior, will be only a five days' journey from the Pacific ocean, twenty days' journey from Canton, China, and only a journey of fifteen days from Liverpool!"

With these things in mind, American statesmen have foretold for Minnesota and her continuously growing cities a brilliant future. In a speech that Seward delivered in St. Paul a few years ago he said among other things: "I now believe that the last seat of power on this great continent will be found somewhere within a radius not very far from the very spot where I stand, at the head of navigation on the Mississippi river."<sup>5</sup> And another politician, Thaddeus Stevens, said concerning Duluth: "Here, where navigation on Lake Superior ends, will sometime arise one of the greatest, if not the greatest, commercial center in America."<sup>6</sup> A beginning has been made, and in a very promising way, as Duluth a year ago consisted of only a lone log cabin and now numbers over four thousand inhabitants. The population is increasing daily and these people are eagerly engaged in building up this coming trade center in a worthy manner.

Settlers stream into Minnesota from all directions, not only from the Old World but from other states in America as well, and the local government has done everything to make access easy to the immense areas that are as yet uncultivated. Besides the millions of acres of land that are already in private hands, or those that the state has reserved for schools, railroads, and the

<sup>5</sup> A longer extract, including this statement, from William H. Seward's speech, which was delivered on September 18, 1860, is quoted by Theodore C. Blegen in his account of "Campaigning with Seward in 1860," *ante*, 8: 153. For the full text see the *Daily Times* (St. Paul) for September 22, 1860.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens expressed an idea similar to this in a speech on the Northern Pacific land grants before the national House on April 27, 1866. *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 2245.

like, there remain almost twenty-four million acres of land, or about half the area of Minnesota, awaiting buyers. In various parts of the state are government offices where contracts with settlers are closed, and the terms are so liberal that it requires only a small capital to be able to secure a farm of suitable size. In the northern part of the state, where the Height of Land is to be found, the country is said to be rich in metals and timber (fir) and less suitable for agriculture. The topography of Minnesota as a whole, however, can best be described as a rolling prairie with soil that is a dark, calcareous loam, which experience has shown to be very suitable for cultivation. The entire state has an abundant water supply with innumerable streams and lakes, and near these is generally found a wealth of trees from oak to fir. Maple abounds wherever trees grow near water.

The inviting appearance of Minnesota is anticipated even on a journey thither. The land along the railway, which is given to the company by the state in order that like projects might be encouraged and all interests thereby promoted, has been parceled out and is cultivated along almost the entire route and presents the aspect of immense fields. The grain had lately been cut. Neat, white-painted houses, surrounded by barns and grain stacks, could be seen in an almost unbroken line. Cattle grazed within inclosures or herded along the small water courses. Large tracts were plowed and ready for seed. They will be covered with snow in a half dozen weeks. Only occasionally appeared trees and brush; and one received the impression that in most places the owners could, without hindrance, put the plow in the ground and at once turn the land into a source of income. At one time all this land could have been purchased from the government for four or five rix-dollars an acre, but it is now worth about fifty rix-dollars, according to the statement of a fellow traveler.<sup>7</sup> My informant, in spite of his youth, was an old settler in Minnesota; but in a state so new, where rapid changes take place, it does not mean much to be among the oldest. Scarcely ten years ago he and his companions fought Indians in the western districts, and now a person actually has to hunt in order to find a redskin in the state. In 1862 the government took vigorous action, and the hostile

<sup>7</sup> The *riksdaler* was worth about twenty-six and a half cents.

tribe, which with fire and sword had undertaken to eject the pioneers, was driven out, together with the peaceful Winnebago, and assigned a tract of land on the Missouri River, where they subsequently could disport themselves. If one meets with a small group of the redskins now at some railway station or on some excursion to any of the beauty spots of which Minnesota has such a wealth, he may be fairly certain that they belong to the Chippewa tribe of Indians so well distributed in the northwestern districts, with whose harmless representatives I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted at the Menomonee River. They have a couple of thousand square miles of land here that they still can call their own, but it is not worth very much.<sup>8</sup> As compensation for ceded land they receive annually from the United States government a certain amount of ammunition for hunting, woolen blankets, tea, and similar articles.

One follows with pleasure the course of his travels long before he comes within the boundaries of Minnesota. Unfortunately the twenty-four hours continuous ride necessitated that a part of the beginning of my journey occurred at a time when the land looks like a single poured substance, here and there illuminated by a little fire in the timber or ornamented with red and green lanterns as one approaches a stopping-place where the rails are so interwoven that one begins to comprehend the roving minds of the Barbox Brothers as Dickens has pictured them in "Mugby Junction." Among the places that I passed through was the capital of Wisconsin, famous for its beautiful situation on five lakes; but I could begin to observe the region only when we approached the boundaries of that state.

It was early morning and a grey fog was all that I saw when I first went out on the platform of the car. But the sun soon gained the mastery and there now followed a wonderfully beautiful sunrise such as one may witness in the fall of the year in western America. All growing things, from the smallest straws to the largest trees, seemed intent on arraying themselves in gorgeous,

<sup>8</sup> Watt relates the story of his meeting with a group of Chippewa "in the backwoods" of Wisconsin in *Fra det fjerne vesten*, 149. The Chippewa lands in Minnesota in 1871 were much more extensive and valuable than the author indicates. Indian Office, *Reports*, 1871, p. 588, 684.

festive garb in advance of their approaching denudation. The leaves shone like gold in the scarlet and green bushes, and the distant hills, up which the fog was slowly climbing, were violet. When daylight shone clear on the scene we were steaming across a little prairie at the edge of the Mississippi River. The French precursors had named it *Prairie du Chien* for the coming civilization. But they have not even been able to retain the name of the land which, with great danger, they were the first to explore, for, even though the name is thus written, it is pronounced by all Americans "Prairie du Schihn," and a person would not be understood if he were to pronounce it in any other way. *Prairie du Chien* is not very large — only half a [Danish] mile long and about half as wide<sup>9</sup> — but on this farthest boundary of Wisconsin there already has been established a little village, and, since the trains have to stop here before they proceed, the place appears rather lively.

In the winter there is a bridge [of ice] across the Mississippi from *Prairie du Chien* to the state of Iowa, whose territory begins on the opposite shore, but as the season was not far enough advanced we shipped across on a little ferry propelled by steam and went a long way around some islands that were overgrown with brush, in order to make connections with the railway. Reddish hills overgrown with a sort of heather, where the white limestone here and there shines through, rise opposite the above mentioned prairie. A little town, McGregor, named after one of the first colonists in these distant regions, has concealed itself among these hills, and from it continues the Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad through Iowa's fertile plains, where the fields of one farm adjoin those of another, until it reaches the boundaries of Minnesota at the little town of Le Roy.

Nowhere is an acquaintance made with such readiness as on a journey, and occasionally a person makes such a one as may be both useful and pleasant. I was in lively conversation with the above mentioned Minnesota man before we had crossed the Mississippi.

<sup>9</sup> In giving distances the author uses throughout the Danish mile, which is equal to four and one-fifth English miles.



"Will you press down on that spring?" was the introduction from his side, as he tried in vain to turn the key in the lock of a traveling bag. The common endeavor was crowned with success, and he brought to light a flask which he had taken along for the journey.

"*Will you have a drink?*" was his next approach. Then we drank together and were friends for the day.

"You see," he explained, as a sort of excuse for having brought a bottle and some food, "we are now coming into a newly settled country and in all probability will get nothing to eat all day. The railroad is only a little more than four years old; and, although a great many so-called towns have grown up along the line, it is doubtful if we shall stop any place except along some wooden sheds."

He was mistaken, however, for at four o'clock in the afternoon, at the little station of Owatonna, a stop of twenty minutes was announced. An immense gong outside a low wooden building (which at a hurried glance one might have mistaken for a barn) announced that here one could appease his hunger. A person must never judge a dog by the hair, and that was demonstrated here also, for inside the simple, red-painted walls were tables with shining white table cloths; a half dozen ladies of the white-faced race in uniforms of white aprons waited behind these; and the hungry traveler, who had had nothing since daybreak, could, to his heart's content, pounce upon trout from the nearest lake, prairie chicken, corn cakes, young buffalo steak, pumpkin pie, grapes, and whatever else the country provided, together with dishes with which Europeans are more familiar.

My American friend was proud of this service in the distant West.

"Well, they won't believe that in Chicago or the other eastern cities," he remarked, speaking of that city, which New Yorkers consider situated on the boundaries of civilization, as though it were located in the middle of Europe.

"Are you traveling homeward?" he inquired later, as we sped across the prairies.

"No, decidedly away from home."

“To look for land in Minnesota?”

“Yes, in a way.”

“Perhaps to hunt or fish? We have fine *Sport*. In the timber and on the prairies you can shoot deer, bear, fox, wolf, badger, and muskrat, and if you go far west you may be lucky enough to meet with buffalo. The rivers and lakes teem with pike, perch, and trout. If you simply wish to enjoy nature you could not have chosen a better trip, for it will be hard to find a state that offers what Minnesota does in that respect. You must be sure to see our waterfalls and our beautiful lakes.”

He almost lost his breath in his enthusiasm in speaking of his new home, the environs of which he had explored thoroughly before he had bought land and located.

I did not like to lose his company for the simple reason that, in a country that has no printed travelers' guides for its most remote regions, it was pleasant to have such a living Baedeker to consult; and, moreover, he talked well, without elegant phrases or pseudo-learned expressions, but just as any quick, naturally gifted man would express himself who has frequented the great woods and the out-stretched prairies and who has been reared in the practical school of life. He told me about the harvest — how the wheat that was raised in Minnesota until about a dozen years ago was hardly sufficient for the small population, whereas the value of the various grains that have been raised since is estimated at about sixty millions of dollars; how the potato yield amounted to three hundred bushels to the acre; about cattle raising and wool production; and about the newly discovered coal mines, the copper and iron ores near Lake Superior, and the great quantities of building stone, which in some places made it possible to pay the expense of digging a cellar by selling and using the stone quarried in the process.

“But it takes labor to get all these sources of wealth to flow,” he said as he slammed his tanned and calloused hands together. “Without working, and working like a horse (and sometimes the horse is poorly fed in the bargain) nothing is accomplished here in the West, and presumably nowhere else either. At first a person must drudge and sweat, but later he can also see improvement.”

He reminded me strikingly of my Canadian friend who had dilated upon the attractions of Ontario, for he made this vigorous little speech with almost the same expression as the latter had used.<sup>10</sup> And I have noticed here in America that the many people with whom I have come in contact speak of their homes, usually lately chosen, with a peculiar enthusiasm as soon as their efforts are crowned with a little success. One thing they all agree upon—that the person who thinks he can get along in America better than elsewhere without work will come to grief.

When I arrived in Mendota I had ridden exactly one hundred Danish miles since I left Milwaukee. There the railroad divides, one track going to the as yet little-known Winona; another to St. Paul's steady rival, Minneapolis, which is situated a short distance up the Mississippi River; and a third to St. Paul. It was evening again, but the expected cold had not come. In spite of the fact that Minnesota adjoins the Hudson Bay's territory and that it now approaches the end of the month of October, we had traveled all day with doors and windows open in the car and the wraps we had brought along packed away. The extreme dry cold does not come until the close of the year, and the snow usually remains until some time in March. Darkness prevented us from enjoying the view from Mendota. The town is said to be very much spread out and very beautiful. It lies a short distance from the mouth of the Minnesota River; but in spite of its generally favorable location, for one of those inexplicable reasons that one so often meets with here, it has not been able to attain prosperity in the manner of Minneapolis and St. Paul. We failed to see the rolling prairies, the Minnesota Valley, the picturesque *Lake Harriet*, and the town of St. Anthony in the distance. But soon numerous lights greeted us from the heights. It was St. Paul that stretched itself on the hilly ground on the east side of the Mississippi River and that, at a quick glance, gave one the impression of a mighty city with thousands of inhabitants, for the houses are so scattered on top of the white limestone bluffs that their appearance is deceptive. The railroad followed the river so closely that it appeared that in case of accident we would roll

<sup>10</sup> Watt tells of his conversation with this Canadian in *Fra det fjerne vesten*, 56-62.

directly into it, and on the other side only the naked wall of rock was visible.

The steam whistle now echoed between the hills, and our temporary destination was reached.

### XVIII *IMMINIJASKA*, THE WHITE ROCK

St. Paul, Minnesota.

The hotel in which I live, and which bears the name of *The Metropolitan*, is an imposing stone building with pillars, verandas, balconies, and the entire extravagant outfit that a large American hotel deems necessary in order to consider itself *first class*. There are, however, many other hotels. This one is located on Third Street and is situated on one of the highest points of the city. When I open my window I have a broad view of the numerous houses of St. Paul, which display all the colors and vary considerably as to solidity. These houses are arranged in irregular lines, on account of the changing terrain, but this very thing appeals to the eye. And the "Father of Waters," which the Indians mean when they say Mississippi, stretches itself lazily among a number of small islands beyond the houses and increases the effect of the picturesque view before me — a picture that has as its background a considerable portion of the Mississippi Valley and as its frame the dim heights that inclose the valley.

Thus it was that I first saw St. Paul, and I found that the city had an unusually beautiful location. But I wished to see the picture from another angle and for that purpose I walked one day down the hilly Third Street, turned to the right, and, after having been stopped by a man who thought I intended to cheat him out of the toll that was his due, continued across what appeared to me to be an endless wooden bridge — once again hailed by Cerberus for smoking a cigar — which stretches across from the limestone bluffs on the east side of the river, across houses, river, and islands, down to the level ground on the west side. When I turned toward the city from this point I had to admit that St. Paul has the most picturesque location of any city I had seen in the United States, although Quebec unquestionably will take the prize when it comes to what I have seen in America.

The city appears to be situated on three immense terraces. Nearest the river is a narrow level bank where a few low houses are built and where the railroad passes through. Here also a little stream purls into the Mississippi. Then the land rises, in some places perpendicularly, about a hundred feet, presenting to view a chalky white wall composed of soft stone blocks in which wind and weather have here and there drawn grotesque figures. Due to its appearance the place was called by the Dakota Indians *Imminijaska*, or the White Rock. On the plain that stretches back from the top of this wall the real city is located. The third terrace is formed by the dark hills that rise in the form of an amphitheater from the plain, and on these are located a few houses and villas. The geology of the site on which the city is built varies so strikingly that it must attract the attention of everyone. Certain quarters are built on a kind of limestone that is soft when it is quarried but soon hardens by contact with the air, and there the buildings are constructed, as a rule, from this stone.

As I sit looking at the city during the warm noon hour, it appears to lie in a stupor. Everything is still. Not even the waters of the Mississippi emit any sound, but move quietly in the clear sunlight. From the Height of Land in the far northern part of Minnesota, which divides the waters that flow into the Gulf of Mexico from those that flow into Hudson Bay, the "Father of Waters" moves slowly on. Then the ancient of days gradually gathers strength, at times advancing stealthily, at times angrily forcing its way through numerous dams and small lakes, and emerges from Lake Itasca as a fairly considerable stream.<sup>11</sup> But not until it has made a turn to the north through Lake Winnipeg [*Winnebagoshish*] and again turned southward is the Mississippi dignified with the name river. From then on it gathers strength, widens greatly, rushes and foams, and before it reaches the Gulf of Mexico it has traversed a distance of more than 750 [*Danish*] miles from its source.

<sup>11</sup> Lake Itasca is generally looked upon as the source of the Mississippi, thought it is fed by a number of small streams not nearly so substantial in size as Watt's statement would lead the reader to believe.

The river god has seen many changes, and not the least have taken place during recent years. There is, for instance, St. Paul, a neat and attractive city with hotels, theaters, large stores, and the Capitol. There the state's chosen men have decided the destiny of the redskins<sup>12</sup>—the free sons of these woods and prairies who earlier held their meetings at the White Rock and did not dream that the pale faces so soon should come to send them out of the land where rest the bones of their great chiefs. But the pale faces became too numerous for them. In St. Paul alone they now number twenty thousand, although it is not long since only one white man lived where Minnesota's capital is located. In 1840 the oldest settler, who still lives there, built his log house on the White Rock, and the same year a Catholic missionary erected there a simple board church, which he called St. Paul.<sup>13</sup> Only another half hundred pioneers arrived within the next eight years. But the population increased from that time on by the thousands, and, instead of the French missionary's little chapel, there may now be seen a score of beautiful churches.

From the broad plain where I am sitting there rises a series of hills overgrown with thin brush, and from these the great western prairies extend for thousands of miles toward the interior. Not far from where the incline toward the river begins, there are a great number of Indian graves. In these the Chippewa and the Dakota, or Sioux, warriors dwell more peaceably together than they ever did while alive.<sup>14</sup> There exists enmity between these tribes, a sort of feud still unsettled, that goes back in time so far that not even the wisest among the warriors are able to

<sup>12</sup> As the author visited Minnesota shortly after the Sioux War and knew that the state officials had taken an active part in suppressing the outbreak, he probably was under the impression that the state legislature had more to do with determining the fate of the Indians than was actually the case.

<sup>13</sup> Watt probably had Benjamin Gervais in mind when he referred to St. Paul's "oldest settler." The missionary was Father Lucian Galtier, who built the Chapel of St. Paul in 1841. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 223; J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul and of the County of Ramsey*, 69 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4).

<sup>14</sup> The Indian mounds at Dayton's Bluff, St. Paul, are Sioux graves, not common graves of Sioux and Chippewa as indicated by Watt.

explain the real reason for the bitter animosities. The tribes have had many meetings for the purpose of establishing peace; but when the pipe of peace has gone the round in the gathering and a sufficient quantity of the favorite *kin-ne-kin-nick*\* has been smoked, the chiefs have scarcely had time to utter the words "I have spoken," before the entire assembly has been in a fight. For example the Chippewa and Dakota Indians met a half score of years ago opposite the White Rock in order to conclude perpetual peace. The speeches, with their peculiar colorful expressions, had been entirely concluded when a Chippewa set out across the river on a log. One of the Sioux could not resist the temptation and he raised his gun to his chin and shot the Chippewa. He earned the right to stick one more eagle's feather in his hair; but quick as lightning the tribes fell to, the guns popped, the tomahawks waved, and, as reported to me by an eye-witness of this murderous fight, the graves were filled with "braves" — the common designation of the Indians for their warriors.<sup>15</sup>

But a bloodier conflict took place some years later, when the tribes, cheated by private tradesmen who were conniving with a lot of government officials, rose against the whites. By ascending to the highest elevations, I can see at the horizon two of the best-known battle fields of the terrible struggles of 1862 and 1863.<sup>16</sup> Approximately eight hundred pioneers, including about three hundred of our northern countrymen, lost their lives,<sup>17</sup> generally after the most horrible tortures, especially when the iso-

\* A mixture of tobacco, bark, and leaves which the Indians themselves prepare. [Author's note]

<sup>15</sup> The author may here be giving a confused account of a battle between the Sioux and the Chippewa that took place on the streets of St. Paul in 1853, or of the battle of Kaposia, fought in 1842. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 180; Williams, *Saint Paul*, 336.

<sup>16</sup> This is obviously an error, as none of the battles of the Sioux War took place so close to St. Paul as is here indicated. See maps in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 268, 392 (St. Paul, 1924).

<sup>17</sup> No official census of Sioux War casualties was taken at the time, but recent investigations show that the number killed in the conflict was about five hundred. Information showing how many of these were Scandinavians does not seem to be available. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 392; Marion P. Satterlee, *A Detailed Account of the Massacre by the Dakota Indians of Minnesota in 1862*, 124 (Minneapolis, 1923).

lated pioneer cabins on the prairies or at the edges of the woods were surprised by the Indians. The shameful swindles and petty persecutions of brutal traders, and the fact that due to the Civil War the government had delayed the payments for land cessions, caused the Indians to be discontented in the highest degree.

Thousands of them were tormented by hunger while they awaited the promised compensation for the glorious hunting grounds from which the whites had driven the game, and they were scoffed at by the traders to whom government officers paid the money belonging to the Indians whenever those robbers, protected by law, presented their demands for the payment of debts. Finally the old patient chiefs were no longer able to restrain the wrath of their warriors, which had smouldered for many years and which finally erupted in so terrific a flame that Minnesota, eight years ago, consisted, so to speak, of one single, blood-drenched battle field. The wild warriors of the Dakota tribe swept across the state from the *Red River* on the western border until their camp fires and their waving aigrettes were visible but a few miles from St. Paul, while the whites who had not been murdered or taken prisoners were driven ahead of the terrible enemies.<sup>18</sup> And other tribes, united by a common hatred of the whites and common grievances, hurried to the assistance of the Sioux "braves." In command of all of them was "Little Crow," a cultured Indian who spoke both French and English. With him was associated the terrible "Cut Nose," who with his own tomahawk had killed seventeen women and children in an immigrant wagon on the prairies while a companion held the horses; the sly *Ptan-doo-tah*, or "Red Otter," the juggler and "medicine man," whom the white women who were taken prisoners later accused of rape; the much-feared hunter *Masa-bom-do*,

<sup>18</sup> Watt evidently got the impression that the Sioux approached close to St. Paul from reading a statement in Isaac V. D. Heard's *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 and 1863*, 300 (New York, 1864). That author relates that during the spring and summer of 1863 small bands of Indians who returned to Minnesota to continue the depredations became "so bold . . . that they lighted their camp-fires within twelve miles of St. Paul." In *Fra det fjerne vesten*, 273, Watt states that much of the information on the Sioux War in his narrative was taken from Heard.



or "*Iron Blower*"; the mighty fighters "The Singer," "Red Leaf," "White Bear," and a great number of other chiefs.<sup>19</sup> Several of these joined the furious young warriors reluctantly, and they did so only because they were accused by the others of having been bribed by the whites.

If the Indians had been able to maintain peace among themselves things might have looked gloomy for the whites even unto this day, but they were soon split up into smaller bands, and the "peace party" gradually gained the ascendancy. Many a conspicuous deed of heroism was done by both sides during these guerilla fights, and many a noble trait of the Indians was exhibited toward the prisoners or fugitive whites; but there were many cases of gruesome revenge. The Cooper Indians have not died out. A person may not expect to meet them on the streets of New York; he must journey out to the great western prairies in order to see them or hear of their exploits from themselves or from their few steadfast friends or many bitter enemies among the whites. Thus there is an old *Squaw* to whom several white people owe their lives. "*Gamle Bet*," [*Old Bets*] is now over a hundred years old, but she still can walk from her near-by cabin to St. Paul, where all know her and remember gratefully how nobly and self-sacrificingly she acted toward the captive women and children who were trailed along during the aforesaid struggles by her tribe, the terrible Sioux Indians. It was due to her in part that the camp in which the prisoners were kept finally surrendered unconditionally; and with this event ended in reality the great Indian campaigns in Minnesota.<sup>20</sup> A short time thereafter twenty-seven red chiefs and warriors were hanged at one time in the town of Mankato, after they, with the greatest composure, had smoked their pipes and joined in the

<sup>19</sup> Here again Watt has drawn on Heard, who gives sketches of most of these Indians in his *Sioux War*, 279-282. For an accurate and detailed account of the outbreak see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 109-242.

<sup>20</sup> A sketch of Old Bets, who was a well-known character in St. Paul until her death in 1873, appears in Williams, *Saint Paul*, 252-254. She was said to have "been kind to the captives" taken by the Indians during the Sioux War and to have been present at Camp Release when they were turned over to Sibley on September 26, 1862, according to Heard, *Sioux War*, 185.

death song.<sup>21</sup> "Little Crow" and a couple of hundred warriors would not surrender, but retreated to "Devil's Lake" farther toward the west, determined to die fighting. Not until 1863 was a pioneer successful in shooting the famous chieftain while he, forsaken by all but his nearest relatives, wandered about in the neighborhood of a settlement. He was endeavoring to procure horses in order to withdraw into the districts that had not yet been acquired by the whites in the territory of Dakota, on the other side of Red River. I have seen his scalp in St. Paul; for the white warriors practiced scalping during the aforesaid struggles as vigorously as the reds, and this sort of barbarism is still practiced on the frontiers of territories that are little settled. Indeed it is only a few years ago since the highest commanding military officer in Minnesota offered a prize for every Indian scalp that was brought to him.<sup>22</sup>

As previously stated, Minnesota has been free from hostile tribes since 1863. By heroic struggles the Sioux Indians were driven to a "Reservation" on the Missouri River, and, with the exception of "Old Bet," it is difficult to find in the neighborhood of the White Rock other Indians than the peaceful Chipewa. On the other hand if one travels to the farthest border of the state toward the west, one will meet occasional wandering Indians of the Dakota tribe. But, as stated, the wars have ceased in Minnesota, and the unfortunate tribes, who as prisoners were transported to the Missouri River by the hundreds, eke out a terrible existence in a barren region where it hardly ever rains, where game is scarce, and where the half-poisoned water (*alkaline water*) in the lakes and streams brings on illness and death.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Thirty-eight Indians and half-breeds were hanged at Mankato on December 27, 1862. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 210.

<sup>22</sup> Little Crow was shot about six miles north of Hutchinson on July 3, 1863, by Nathan and Chauncy Lampson. A bounty was placed on Sioux scalps brought to the adjutant general's office during the summer and fall of 1863. See Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 283-286, 289. Watt must have seen Little Crow's scalp in the museum of the Minnesota Historical Society, for it was placed there in 1868.

<sup>23</sup> For the story of the removal of the Sioux from Minnesota see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 258-264.

The white population had become so embittered on account of the outrages perpetrated by the Indians that it demanded that all tribes whose warriors had taken part in the conflict should be sent out of the state; and thus many a good Indian, who in the hour of danger had acted as a protector of the whites, had to share the woeful fate of his tribe and exchange the country that he loved for an earthly hell on the Missouri River. Meanwhile the plows of the pioneers are transforming the prairies into wheat fields, and prosperity is spreading over the richly endowed state of Minnesota.

A bent form, dressed fantastically, makes her way across the long bridge and disappears over the hills behind me, after having stopped for a moment to examine the city on the White Rock. It is "Old Bet," called by the Indians *Azeyamanka-win*, or the Berry Picker, a pitiful remnant of the once mighty Dakota tribe. She stops, while her rags play in the wind, and peers toward the capital of Minnesota, which she in a special way assisted in giving back to the "pale faces" who have brought death and destruction to her race.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).