

had created interest and love for the country, and we feel very much concerned about it at this time.

J. H. KLOVSTAD

### THE NESMITH CAVE HOAX: A COMMUNICATION

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, December 12, 1929

TO THE EDITOR:

I note on page 467 of the December number of your magazine an item quoted from the *Minneapolis Journal*, written by Mr. A. J. Russell, giving credit to the late David Edwards as the author of the Nesmith Cave hoax.<sup>1</sup> Now I wish to correct this, as it is an error. David Edwards had nothing to do with that little joke, as I believe I can show you. It is of course of small importance, yet in writing history I believe accuracy is considered the proper course to pursue. Mr. Russell doubtless got his information from the book published several years since, written by the late Frank G. O'Brien, a pioneer citizen of St. Anthony.<sup>2</sup> In this book he gave credit for this story to David Edwards, without any investigation on his part. I spoke to him about the matter and told him who the author was, but he made no move to correct it before his death. Now the facts are that this [*a letter published in 1867 over the pseudonym of "Luther Chamberlin," in which the Nesmith Cave was described*] was written by the late Edward L. Welles, who was an old friend of my parents and for many years a member of our family in St. Anthony.<sup>3</sup> He wrote this, and I

<sup>1</sup> The item in question merely calls attention to an article by Mr. Russell in the *Minneapolis Journal* for August 2 in which Edwards is characterized as "St. Anthony's First Wag" and is described as the perpetrator of the "Great Nesmith Cave Hoax." *Ed.*

<sup>2</sup> One chapter of O'Brien's *Minnesota Pioneer Sketches* (Minneapolis, 1904) is devoted to "David Edwards and His Nesmith Cave Hoax" (p. 160-167). *Ed.*

<sup>3</sup> The letter appears in the *Minneapolis Journal* for January 9, 1867. It describes an alleged visit paid by "Luther Chamberlin," one Nesmith, and the members of the city council of St. Anthony to a great cave, which was entered through Nesmith's cellar. Steps of stone with iron railings; great chambers, in one of which was a marvelous tower two hundred feet in circumference; the skeletons of a "serpent of incredible size" and of a man

well remember how he used to read it to us in the evenings at home. The cave in question is on the east bank of the river, located under what was known as the Mineral Springs; it was intended as a power tunnel and was excavated by the Chute brothers. It was started, as before stated, under the springs and was dug as far up Main Street as the present Pillsbury A Mill, when on account of faulty engineering it was stopped by a cave-in. I well remember that a large cottonwood tree sank several feet at that point. The cave-in stopped all work and the project was given up. Mr. Welles was somewhat of a "wag," and he not only wrote this up for amusement, but just to see how far he could go he sent it to the publishers of *Chambers's Encyclopædia* and it was printed in one of the editions of that work. Mr. Welles died several years ago in Brooklyn, New York. I knew David Edwards well and will admit that he was surely a village "wag," but in this case he has been given credit for something he never did. This may be of no particular interest to the society, but I am sure of my ground and know I am right in my statements herein.

C. E. VAN CLEVE

eight feet in height; and various implements of brass, silver, and iron are among the "finds" reported. The party is reported to have penetrated "about 5,000 feet into the interior of the earth, and Mr. Nesmith said that there were still innumerable chambers beyond." Speculation, wrote "Luther Chamberlin," is "rampant as to the origin of the cavern and by what race inhabited." He adds that "Minnesota is still in her infancy, and there is no telling what may yet be found underneath her surface." *Ed.*



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