

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE FRONTIER PRESS: TWO COMMUNICATIONS

THE WABASHA COUNTY HERALD-STANDARD

There is a previous chapter that affects the present *Wabasha County Herald-Standard*, mentioned in the very interesting article on the "Frontier Press of Minnesota" in the December, 1933, issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY, that may be of interest—so here is the story.

When William C. McMaster, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, arrived at Read's Landing on the steamer "Cremona" on April 19, 1857, with his family, it included two sons, Joseph and William J., aged respectively twenty-nine and nineteen. Among their effects was a complete printing outfit—newspaper and job—brought for the express purpose of establishing a newspaper at Read's Landing. Joseph was a full-fledged printer, having learned the trade in Ireland, and William was well versed in the craft for his years.

The outfit was set up at once and the initial number of a paper which bore the name *Waumadee Herald* was issued under the date of May 9, 1857. We have been told that this particular name was used, chiefly, to assist certain people in their effort to have the name of Read's Landing changed to Waumadee. The paper, however, was not printed until the morning of Tuesday, May 12, 1857. That afternoon Joseph McMaster and a younger brother, Thomas, accompanied by two other men, went out on the Mississippi in a sailboat which capsized and the two brothers were drowned.

This put an end to the paper, so far as the McMasters were concerned, as William lacked the age and experience to carry on. Some two months or so later, N. E. Stevens came in from some point in Wisconsin and purchased the

outfit. Just when this happened is not known, but in February, 1879, the writer saw in a reading room at Read's Landing a copy of volume 1, number 2, of the *Waumadee Herald* which bore the date of August 15, 1857, and reported the fact in the local news of the place published in Lake City, by William J. McMaster. How long Stevens continued the paper as the *Waumadee Herald* is unknown.

D. S. B. Johnston in his "Minnesota Journalism in the Territorial Period," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 10, gives an account of the *Waumadee Herald* and the *Wabashaw County Herald*. He erroneously says that Thomas McMaster was one of the proprietors of the *Waumadee Herald*. Thomas was neither a newspaper man nor a printer. Johnston figures backward from the earliest known copy of the *Wabashaw County Herald* in existence—volume 2, number 22, dated January 29, 1859, now in the files of the Minnesota Historical Society—and on the supposition that the paper was issued each week, finds that the date of volume 1, number 1, of the *Herald* should have been September 5, 1857.

This is a reasonable conclusion based on continuous weekly publication and would suggest that Stevens may have published the *Waumadee Herald* on August 22 and 29 before changing the name to *Wabashaw County Herald*. There is no evidence, however, as to the number of issues brought out between August 15, 1857, and January 29, 1859. Nor is there any evidence that when Stevens changed the name of the paper, volume 1, number 1, was applied to that issue. In fact we consider that it was more than a fifty-fifty proposition that he continued the *Waumadee Herald* volume and numbers when he changed the name, since there was no change in ownership or policy. In any event the present *Wabasha County Herald-Standard* had its beginning in the *Waumadee Herald* dated May 9, 1857. Stevens told the writer a number of years ago that he changed the name to give the paper a better standing in

the county and that he moved the paper from Read's Landing to Wabasha in 1860. For some time before that, the date line of the paper carried the names of both places.

There are two copies of the original McMaster paper in existence. One, which was in the pocket of Thomas, whose body was not recovered for nearly six weeks after the drowning, is in the possession of the writer, and the other is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

William J. McMaster continued in the newspaper business and was employed on various newspapers, including Lute A. Taylor's *Prescott* [Wisconsin] *Journal* and the *St. Paul Press*, until 1865, when with T. H. Perkins he purchased the *Lake City Times* and changed the name to *Lake City Leader*. McMaster was editor of the *Leader* most of the time until March, 1880, when failing health compelled his retirement. He died on June 10, 1880.

You may wonder how the writer happens to know so much of this ancient history. He came to Read's Landing in 1867 and ten years later it was his great good fortune to secure for a companion for over fifty years Clara M., the youngest member of the William C. McMaster family. One thing that always stood out in her childhood recollections was her first view of Read's Landing from the shoulder of her father on the deck of the "Cremona." Lake Pepin was late in opening in 1857 and there was a long line of steamers tied up at the little town waiting for the ice to go out of Lake Pepin so that they might get through to St. Paul. Some accounts say there were thirty-three boats, others say twenty-seven, but there were plenty to leave a lasting impression on the child's mind. Her most cherished possessions were the copy of the *Wauwadee Herald* found on the body of her brother and a picture of the members of the first Minnesota editorial convention in 1867, in the organization of which another brother took a prominent part.

FRED A. BILL

THE MANKATO INDEPENDENT

In the last number of MINNESOTA HISTORY appears an article on the "Frontier Press of Minnesota" by Herman Roe, and on page 397 he gives the roll call of the twelve oldest newspapers in Minnesota with the dates when they were established. The list omits the *Mankato Independent*, however, which issued its first number on June 13, 1857. It was edited by Clinton B. Hensley and Frank W. Gunning, who came to Mankato from Kokomo, Indiana. It was quite an able newspaper and has been continued from that day down to the present time. Hensley died in December, 1862, and the paper was sold in July, 1863, to Charles H. Slocum, who changed the name to the *Union*. In November, 1879, the paper was sold to General James H. Baker, who also bought a Democratic paper edited by J. C. Wise and called the *Mankato Record*. Baker consolidated the two under the name of the *Mankato Free Press*, which is still issued as the *Mankato Daily Free Press*, the weekly edition having been discontinued some years ago. Thus the *Free Press* may be traced back to the *Independent*, and that was established, as stated, on June 13, 1857.

On page 398, Mr. Roe erroneously states that the *Mankato Free Press* was started in 1859, but the real facts are as above stated. The *Record* was started about July, 1859, as a Democratic paper and a rival of the *Independent*, but the *Free Press* really originated as the *Independent*. The *Record* was sold by Wise to C. O. Brown, who changed it to a Republican paper, and General Baker really bought the *Record* from Brown and consolidated it with the *Union*. Both papers advocated the principles of the Republican party, but they represented two factions of that party.

I have copies of the old *Independent* which were issued in 1857.

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