

## BRIDGES FACING EAST<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who has worked with the literature of the frontier has undoubtedly encountered numerous references in letters to the isolation and loneliness of the civilized white men in the West. In 1833 Nathan Jarvis, post surgeon at Fort Snelling, described the efforts of the men stationed there to keep themselves occupied. He probably voiced the general sentiment of his comrades when he exclaimed: "As to news, little can occur in this distant region, secluded from the world. We pass our time something in the way of exiles, banish'd from the pleasures and I may add the follies of civiliz'd life."<sup>2</sup>

The Pond brothers came out to the mission field doubting, at least in moments of gloom, whether it were possible for anyone to return from such an errand as theirs to greet once more his family and friends; and Sherman Hall, stationed at La Pointe during the early forties, also emphasized the isolation that the scattered Christian families had to endure in their wilderness homes. Writing of the following decade, John H. Stevens complained that people in the East thought of Minnesota as little more than a jungle, and added apologetically that Sibley and Ramsey and other spokesmen were doing their best to correct the impression. Yet even as they spoke a farmer from Indiana, Mitchell Young Jackson, who had recently brought his family to a new home near Lakeland on the St. Croix River, made sober notations in his diary during a cold, bleak winter;<sup>3</sup> and at

<sup>1</sup>A paper read at the afternoon session of the eighty-sixth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, held in the Historical Building, St. Paul, January 21, 1935. *Ed.*

<sup>2</sup>"An Army Surgeon's Frontier Service," in *Military Service Institution of the United States, Journal*, 39: 131 (July-August, 1906).

<sup>3</sup>See the entries for the winter of 1854-55, particularly for December 24, 1854, in the diary of Mitchell Young Jackson. All the manuscript material used in the preparation of this paper is in the possession of the

Christmas time he explained to his young sons that "Santa Claus has not learned the way up to Minnesota yet."

Although the Minnesota frontiersmen endured periods of loneliness, isolation should not be considered a regional attribute, descriptive of life in the West, but not applicable to the East. Density of population was a local matter, and it should not be forgotten that in the river towns on the upper Mississippi a vigorous social and civic life developed at a comparatively early date. Life in Minnesota was always related more or less closely to events and developments in the rest of the country, and numerous ties—economic, political, professional, and cultural—made the townsfolk, at least, feel that they formed an integral part of the nation, despite the fact that they lived on the western fringes of settlement.

The bridge of economic interdependence provided perhaps the most important avenue of communication between East and West. From the earliest invasion of the wilderness by the fur trader until the present the pressure of material need or material ambition has been a cohesive force binding forest, farm, and city together. One of the most striking features of the organization of the Northwest Company was the system of conference and communication that kept the partners and clerks in touch with each other. The summer meetings at Grand Portage and Fort William brought to the heart of the wilderness some of the keenest minds in Canada, and the winter expresses effected an interchange of news between Montreal and the most remote trading posts. During a later period the American Fur Company not only established lines of transport and communication between the New York offices and subordinate stations in the West, but it also acted as an express company and a banking concern for government agents, missionaries, and travelers whose credit was good despite their

Minnesota Historical Society. See also John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People*, 100 (Minneapolis, 1890).

lack of ready cash. The company also was instrumental in effecting a mutual exchange of goods between East and West. Everyone knows that thousands of dollars worth of valuable peltries came out of the American forest; it is not so commonly recognized that the forest was a market of some importance. Agents of the company, of whom Henry H. Sibley was one, roamed through Ohio contracting for provisions to be sent to western posts. In fact, the American Fur Company was for a time one of the largest single consumers of the agricultural produce exported by that state.<sup>4</sup>

With the gradual growth of permanent settlements along the Mississippi, the fur companies ceased to enjoy a monopoly of intersectional trade, for competitors appeared and commercial enterprise became increasingly specialized. Luxuries, as well as staples, were imported from eastern cities. In 1865 H. C. Burbank ordered a piano costing \$750.00 for his home in St. Cloud, and he sent \$68.70 to New York in payment for hardware.<sup>5</sup>

Banking became more highly integrated as settlement advanced and it came to be associated with land rather than with furs. The problem of finding a stable currency was one that involved the frontiersman inevitably in more or less complicated relations with the East and South. Wild-cat banks issuing worthless paper within the territory were scarcely less dangerous to economic security than similiar institutions in Georgia which sent notes to the most distant regions to be distributed at face value.<sup>6</sup> Banking houses were opened in St. Paul which, although not subsidiary to New York concerns, did establish close relations with them, sending drafts east for credit and keeping a working balance

<sup>4</sup>Theodore C. Blegen, ed., *The Unfinished Autobiography of Henry Hastings Sibley*, 24 (Minneapolis, 1932).

<sup>5</sup>See Burbank's manuscript account book of the expenses involved in building and furnishing his home, Burbank Papers.

<sup>6</sup>Sydney A. Patchin, "The Development of Banking in Minnesota," *ante*, 2: 124-130 (August, 1917).

on hand in one or more eastern institutions. Truman M. Smith, who built up a good business as banker and land broker in St. Paul in the middle fifties, had the lesson of interdependence impressed upon him during the panic of 1857. For some months he was not seriously embarrassed, and he boasted to a friend that failures in the East did not necessarily mean disaster in Minnesota. Disillusionment soon followed, however, and he was forced to close his doors. On December 14, 1857, he wrote these significant words to an associate: "But our *Eastern Friends* must know that we in the Far West need some Time as Well as them in the East—all our Banks, myself as well as the Rest, would have *Stood Firm and unshaken* if it had not been for our Eastern Correspondents not fulfilling their contracts with us."<sup>7</sup>

The frontier financier emerged from the crisis of 1857 a sadder and a wiser man, but the years that followed found all good Minnesota boosters leaning yet more heavily on the East in their efforts to people the new state and to bring wealth and industry within its boundaries. Fortunes were made from rising real estate values, but all such profits were based on the increased demand for land that accompanied the immigration movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus the immigration bureau set up by the state, itinerant lecturers like Edwin Whitefield who were supported by colonization companies, and high-pressure methods employed by the railways are important evidences of the close economic interrelationships that existed between the frontier towns and the East or Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The unifying part played by transportation agencies, the steamboat as well as the railroad, is too apparent to require elaboration. A paragraph from Frank B. Mayer's travel

<sup>7</sup> Truman Smith to A. Parkhurst, December 14, 1857, in Smith Letter Books.

<sup>8</sup> A collection of Whitefield's sketches and water-color paintings of Minnesota scenes and some of his manuscript reports on the region are preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society.

narrative, describing the group he found on board a boat at Galena in 1851, is, however, deserving of quotation:

A number of Prussian emigrants of the better class, with their beards, good figures & foreign costumes, a party of Irishmen, said to be "noble," a certain officer of the army undoubtedly "royal" who amused us & astonished too by his wit & extensive information, merchants from St. Louis & the east, raftsmen from the head waters of the Mississippi, farmers from Iowa & Wisconsin & in fact representatives of almost every state in the Union, with Canada & Europe were found in the Cabin.<sup>9</sup>

The exploitation of the natural resources of forest, field, and mine could not be effected without eastern help—help in man power, help also in capital investments. The growth of the lumber business was made possible in part by the influx of laborers from Maine. The export of wheat in large quantities awaited the introduction of harvesting machinery from Chicago. The exploitation of the mines of the Minnesota iron ranges was achieved on an extensive scale only with the financial assistance of Charlemagne Tower of Philadelphia and Andrew Carnegie of Pittsburgh.

Exploration and the extension of military and political control into the wilderness served to join Minnesota to the rest of the nation. Expeditions sent out by the national government brought such men as Zebulon M. Pike, Stephen H. Long, and Henry R. Schoolcraft to the upper valley of the Mississippi, and the establishment of Fort Snelling furnished a northern terminus for a steamboat line from St. Louis. The military was for many years an important link that kept the frontier in touch with Washington. Nor should the Indian agent be forgotten, occupying as he did an intermediary position between the Great White Father and his children of the forest and plain. The administration of Indian affairs, the disposition of the public lands, and the fixing of the political status of the territory were

<sup>9</sup> Bertha L. Heilbron, ed., *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851: The Diary and Sketches of Frank Blackwell Mayer*, 87 (St. Paul, 1932).

all problems that occupied national legislators and government officials during the frontier period of Minnesota's history. Numerous agents and emissaries were sent to St. Paul, some to negotiate treaties of cession with the Indians, others, like Alexander Ramsey, to act as territorial officials. Politics accounted for the appearance of western men, both red and white, in the national capital. Picturesque indeed were the deputations of Indians that were escorted to Washington to discuss treaty stipulations. Of greater importance were the delegates whose repeated visits to the capital city resulted in the creation of the Territory of Minnesota and in the admission of Minnesota to statehood in 1858.

Many figures of national prominence paid visits to Minnesota towns. In 1854 the former president Fillmore, George Bancroft, and numerous other celebrities journeyed up the Mississippi as guests of the Rock Island Railroad. During the campaign of 1859 well-known speakers represented both the Democratic and the Republican parties. Stephen A. Douglas was welcomed to St. Paul by the Democrats; and John P. Hale of New Hampshire, Galusha A. Grow of Pennsylvania, Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, Francis P. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, and Carl Schurz of Wisconsin stumped the state for the Republicans. In 1860 a German brewer in La Crosse played host to Charles Francis Adams and William H. Seward, showing them through his plant while they waited for the boat to take them on up the river. Visits by such men as these could not but make the inhabitants of Minnesota settlements feel that distance was after all no barrier to an acquaintance with national political figures.<sup>10</sup>

Professional and cultural activities provided bonds of

<sup>10</sup> The visit of Adams and Seward to Minnesota is reported in Adams' diary and in the journal of Charles Francis Adams, Jr., passages from which are printed *ante*, 8: 156-171 (June, 1927). For an account of the railroad excursion of 1854 by William J. Petersen, see *ante*, 15: 405-420. The political speakers who came to Minnesota in 1859 are mentioned in William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2: 60 (St. Paul, 1924).

mutual interest between Minnesota and the East. From an early date religious organizations looked upon the region west of Lake Superior as a promising field for missionary work and established stations in the wilderness which, while geographically isolated, nevertheless kept in touch with a home base in Boston, Oberlin, Dubuque, or, perhaps, Vienna. Supplies and clothing from the East often reached the western mission stations; and the efforts of mission workers to teach the gospel to their Indian brethren resulted in trips to Ohio or New England to arrange for the publication of hymnbooks, catechisms, or portions of the scriptures, translated into the Sioux or Chippewa tongue. These visits to the East were not always made for purely professional reasons. In 1842, for example, Frederic Ayer obtained permission from his mission board to return to Ohio in order to give his children an adequate education.<sup>11</sup>

In a later period the home missionary movement was important, and for some years the Christian message continued to be propagated with the support of eastern societies and through the efforts of eastern men. "Our ministers meeting was appointed for this week," wrote George Biscoe, stationed in 1865 at Cottage Grove, "but we have postponed it indefinitely on account of the absence of Messrs. Hall, Seccombe, Packard and Salter who have gone to the meeting at Boston."<sup>12</sup> By the time that church organization in the state had become self-supporting, the influence of leading clericals began to reach back from the frontier to affect national policy. No account of the administration of American Indian relations can be complete that does not make reference to Bishop Henry B. Whipple's active interest in the welfare of the red men.

<sup>11</sup> Frederic Ayer to David Greene, December 15, 1841; Greene to Ayer, March 4, 1842, papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

<sup>12</sup> George Biscoe to his mother, June 4, 1865, Biscoe Papers.

The medical men of Minnesota were fully conscious of the need of a professional organization that would enable them to exchange information with one another and to keep abreast of experimental work in other parts of the world. A state medical society was organized at an early date and was affiliated with the American Medical Association. Delegates from Minnesota attended national conventions and meetings of other state societies and Minnesota physicians kept in touch with the progress of medicine in eastern centers. On one occasion the meetings of the national association were held in St. Paul.

The desire to regain health and strength led many Easterners to journey to Minnesota, where, it was alleged, the dry, invigorating climate would repair the most stubborn constitutional ailment. Henry D. Thoreau, the well-known naturalist and author, and W. H. Peckham, a prominent New York lawyer, were only two of a considerable group whose visits to the West were occasioned by poor health.<sup>18</sup> Many of the sufferers did not return. Some of them recovered and became attached to their new homes; others failed to recover and, in a good many cases, became a charge on the community. Physicians became alarmed at the number of persons who were unable to earn a living, and endeavored to discourage invalids from coming to Minnesota unless they had means of support and a reasonable hope of recovery. Dr. Brewer Mattocks, president of the St. Paul board of health, published a book in 1871 explaining that there were limits to what a climate could do and pointing out that sick people would often do well to remain at home rather than expose themselves to the dangers of a long journey and the hardships of life on the frontier. It was not fair, he said, for a young man to come west from Boston,

<sup>18</sup> For an article on "Thoreau in Minnesota," by John T. Flanagan, see *post*, p. 35. Peckham's visit is mentioned in the sketch of his life in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 14: 387 (New York, 1934).



only to die in St. Paul leaving behind him an unpaid board bill.<sup>14</sup>

In the field of education, as of religion, the rise of frontier towns was accompanied by the founding of institutions that were essentially of an eastern pattern. President Jabez Brooks of Hamline University combined in his experience an elementary education in Wisconsin and college training at Connecticut Wesleyan. The course of study offered by Hamline was definitely classical in tone, despite the remote location of the institution in the town of Red Wing.<sup>15</sup> Dr. Folwell, an eastern man with an eastern wife, traveled widely; and he corresponded, even during his early years of residence in Minneapolis, with such men of prominence as President Eliot of Harvard and President White of Cornell. He viewed the problems of university administration with a breadth of vision that took account of developments in educational practice throughout the country, and his inaugural address of 1869 is but a single illustration of the way he scanned the national scene in his search for answers to Minnesota's problems. On that occasion he remarked:

Although the development of the American agricultural college has been slow, yet excellent beginnings have at length been made. The experiments made in Massachusetts, Illinois, and particularly in Michigan, suggest several lines upon which it may take place. The early attempts at forming agricultural schools in the State of New York and elsewhere have shown also by what courses it cannot take place.<sup>16</sup>

Closely associated with formal education were the many cultural ties that bound the river towns to the rest of the nation. The lyceum and Chautauqua movements reached out to the edge of the prairie, literary associations were

<sup>14</sup> Brewer Mattocks, *Minnesota as a Home for Invalids*, 143 (Philadelphia, 1871).

<sup>15</sup> Hellen D. Asher, "A Frontier College of the Middle West: Hamline University, 1854-69," *ante*, 9: 363-378 (December, 1928).

<sup>16</sup> William W. Folwell, *University Addresses*, 12 (Minneapolis, 1909); Solon J. Buck, ed., *William Watts Folwell: The Autobiography and Letters of a Pioneer of Culture*, 196-206 (Minneapolis, 1933).

formed, and visiting lecturers were brought to the West, often to speak under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association or a library association. As early as 1850, a professor from Cleveland visited St. Paul, and in January, 1852, William D. Phillips gave a lecture on the Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth, which was reported to be well attended. Ralph Waldo Emerson lectured in St. Louis in 1852 and paid regular visits to the West for a number of years thereafter. In 1867 he spoke to large audiences at Winona, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Faribault, his subjects being "American Culture" and "The Man of the World." His lecture at St. Paul was one of twelve arranged by the St. Paul Library Association, and his talk at Winona was one of a similar series. The popularity of the St. Paul lectures is suggested by the balance sheet of the lecture committee, which at the end of the season showed net profits amounting to nearly a thousand dollars. Eastern speakers were attracted to the frontier towns by the relatively large fees paid by western lecture associations. In 1868 G. L. Turbert, manager of a Dubuque speakers' bureau, brought thirty-five lectures to the upper Mississippi.<sup>17</sup>

Literary works made their appeal alike to readers in East and West. Private libraries in Minnesota were surprisingly comprehensive. Martin McLeod, resting for a day at John H. Fairbanks' trading post on Red Lake during the winter of 1836, amused himself by reading from the *Lady of the Lake*, *Scottish Chiefs*, and *Thaddeus of Warsaw*; and in the following decade Henry H. Sibley ordered such books as Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella*, the *Conquest of Mexico*, Hallam's *Middle Ages*, Thiers' *French Revolution*,

<sup>17</sup> Hubert H. Hoeltje, "Ralph Waldo Emerson in Minnesota," *ante*, 11:145-148; *St. Paul Pioneer*, January 16, 1868. See also Gladys H. Du Priest, "Social Life in Southern Minnesota, 1865-80," 34-39; and Edna Nelson, "Some Cultural Activities and Associations in Minnesota, 1849-58," 3. Typewritten copies of these term papers are preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society. They are based largely on local newspaper material.

and Froissart's *Chronicles*.<sup>18</sup> William G. Le Duc opened the Minnesota Bookstore in St. Paul in the early fifties, and library associations circulated the popular books of the day among those who could not afford to buy them. Minnesotans subscribed to magazines and fashion books, and the ladies kept so closely in touch with current styles that in 1868 a visitor from the East in Minneapolis remarked that she might have thought herself in New York. Members of the reading public also interested themselves in the news of the day, and it is a fact of some significance that in 1856 there were in Minnesota 2,943 subscribers to the *New York Tribune*, a subscription list larger than any local paper could boast.<sup>19</sup> The St. Paul papers copied outstanding items of news from eastern news sheets and, after 1860, announced events of particular importance from reports received by telegraph.

Music lovers had opportunities to attend concerts given by traveling orchestral groups and soloists of note. A philharmonic concert troupe and a Hessian band were well received. Ole Bull delighted frontier audiences with violin selections, and Adelina Patti sang in Minnesota in 1857. A group of New Orleans minstrels came to town, and some Swiss bell ringers demonstrated their skill on at least one occasion. In the lesser towns of the state musical talents were encouraged, and as early as 1871 a state-wide musical convention was held in St. Paul.

Other diversions were no less important as cultural forces. A circus visited St. Paul as early as 1850. In 1868 Orton's company covered the frontier from Texas to Minnesota, and in other years Van Amberg, Bailey, and finally P. T. Barnum brought shows to town. Before the days of the

<sup>18</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, ed., *Unfinished Autobiography of Henry Hastings Sibley*, 75 (Minneapolis, 1932); Grace Lee Nute, ed., "The Diary of Martin McLeod," *ante*, 4: 388.

<sup>19</sup> *Minnesota Republican*, November 13, 1856; Theodore C. Blegen, "Minnesota Pioneer Life as Revealed in Newspaper Advertisements," *ante*, 7: 113; *New York Tribune*, December 12, 1868.

railroads, small boys would rise at dawn and walk several miles toward a neighboring town to meet the circus caravan.<sup>20</sup>

Riding associations were formed, one of the more notable being the Mankato Driving Park Association, which held in 1875 one of the largest horse-racing meets of the decade. Horses were entered from Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, and as far south as Mississippi. Nor should it be forgotten that agricultural fairs, which came to be an institution in Minnesota as elsewhere, attracted visitors by their fine exhibits of agricultural produce and were important influences in bringing in settlers.<sup>21</sup>

During Minnesota's frontier years the very fact that so much of the country was not thickly populated made the lake and river towns popular resorts for visitors and travelers from the South and East. As early as 1836 the steamboat "Palmyra" brought thirty passengers to Fort Snelling, and in the years that followed the trip up the river from St. Louis to the Falls of St. Anthony became, in the words of George Catlin, the "Fashionable Tour." Longfellow did his part in attracting traveling folk to Minnehaha Falls; and Fredrika Bremer, the Swedish author who visited St. Anthony in 1850, became enthusiastic over the picturesque scenery, declaring Minnesota to be the loveliest wilderness she had ever seen.<sup>22</sup>

The number of holiday visitors continued to grow for several decades. Frontenac came to be known as the "Newport of the West," and Lake Minnetonka won a reputation which continues to the present day. In 1868 a visitor from New York wrote of Lake Harriet as a summer resort: "The several farm-houses on its shores are during the warm months all boarding-houses, overflowing

<sup>20</sup> Du Priest, "Social Life," 13, 43; Blegen, *ante*, 7: 112.

<sup>21</sup> Du Priest, "Social Life," 29; Stevens, *Personal Recollections*, 242.

<sup>22</sup> Stevens, *Personnel Recollections*, 90; Marcus L. Hansen, *Old Fort Snelling*, 159-175 (Iowa City, 1918).

with guests from Eastern and Southern cities, come to enjoy the quiet, the delicious air, the hunting, boating and fishing, all these Lakes being well stocked with fish."<sup>23</sup> Lovers of winter sports found an abundant variety of diversions during the colder months, and residents of eastern towns who had relatives in the West often visited them for several weeks during the year.

Thus business and pleasure conspired to make the towns of the upper valley one with the rest of the country, and life along the river exhibited an amazing cosmopolitanism. Is it reasonable to think of existence in pioneer Minnesota as isolated when there was such a constant surging of people and when civilization itself moved out to the frontier? Dr. Folwell stoutly refused to consider it so, and this paper may appropriately be brought to a close by a quotation from one of his letters to his mother, written soon after his arrival in Minnesota: "I hope you will not think of us as out of the world. We are in the exact *middle* of the world. If you could see what fine young cities these two are you wouldn't feel sorry for us at all."<sup>24</sup>

CHARLES M. GATES

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ST. PAUL

<sup>23</sup> *Tourist Guide to the Health and Pleasure Resorts of the Golden Northwest*, 63 (Chicago, 1879); *New York Tribune*, December 12, 1868.

<sup>24</sup> Folwell, *Autobiography*, 203.



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