

SOME SOURCES FOR NORTHWEST HISTORY

SPORTING MAGAZINES

A neglected source of historical information about the Northwest is to be found in periodicals devoted to recreation and outdoor life. Conspicuous alike for their content and for the caliber of their editorship are two nineteenth century sporting magazines published in New York City—the *Spirit of the Times* and *Forest and Stream*.

William T. Porter established the *Spirit of the Times* on December 10, 1831, and until his death in 1858 he was the "spirit" of that journal and of a later publication, *Porter's Spirit of the Times*.¹ As its subtitle implies, the *Spirit of the Times* was "A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage." *Forest and Stream* was founded and edited for seven years by Charles Hallock, a scientist-journalist. The first issue of this magazine appeared on August 14, 1873.² Some idea of the variety of

¹The *Spirit of the Times* was published until June, 1861. Porter severed his connection with it in August, 1856. In September of that year he became editor of a new publication, *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, which ran until February, 1860. The Minnesota Historical Society has a file of the *Spirit of the Times* extending from April 26, 1845, to February 7, 1857 (volumes 15 to 26). It has also *Porter's Spirit of the Times* from September 6, 1856, to February 28, 1857 (volume 1). Volumes 12, 13, 15, and 29 of the *Spirit of the Times* are in the library of the University of Minnesota. For a sketch of Porter see the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 15: 107.

²In May, 1877, *Forest and Stream* merged with the magazine *Rod and Gun*, and for a time thereafter the title of the publication was *Forest and Stream & Rod and Gun*. Later it again assumed the title *Forest and Stream*. The Minnesota Historical Society's file of this publication extends from August 14, 1873, to July 31, 1879 (volumes 1 to 12) and from May 25, 1907, to March 12, 1910 (volumes 68 to 74). The Minneapolis Public Library has volumes 1 to 5, 9 to 18, 20 to 31, and 34 to 65. For a sketch of Hallock see the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 8: 156.

subjects with which it was concerned may be obtained by noting the sections into which it is divided. There are departments devoted to "Sea and River Fishing," "The Kennel," "Game Bag and Gun," "Furs and Trapping," "Yachting and Boating," "Woodland, Farm and Garden," "Billiards," and other pastimes and activities. In 1880, while visiting in the Middle West, Hallock founded in Kittson County, Minnesota, a town, called Hallock in his honor, which became a rendezvous for sportsmen.

Although these magazines were published in the East, they contain a surprisingly large amount of material of interest to the student of the history of the upper Mississippi Valley. Among the contributors to the magazines were numbered many sportsmen of and visitors to the Northwest. These correspondents not only related matters of interest to the sporting world but described the nature and development of "the remote wilds of the West" to an audience which, for the most part, was unfamiliar with the region. Writing under the name of "Hal—a Dacotah," Henry H. Sibley as early as the middle forties sent to the *Spirit of the Times* accounts of hunting expeditions in Minnesota and Iowa and sketches of Indian life. One may guess from the number of inquiries printed concerning the identity of "this favorite Far West correspondent" that his contributions were eagerly accepted and avidly read.³ In a series of articles in *Forest and Stream* entitled "Vacation Rambles in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota," Hallock describes

³ Of the articles that Sibley contributed to the *Spirit of the Times*, the following have been located: "Sketches of Two Hunting Excursions to the Red Cedar, Missouri Territory," April 16, 1842, and April 15 and June 17, 1843; "A Buffalo and Elk Hunt in 1842," April 11, 1846 (reprinted *ante*, 15: 385-394); "Hunting in the Western Prairies," April 17, 1847; "Sketches of Indian Warfare," March 11, 1848; "Hunting in the Northwest," April 1, 1848; and "Buffalo Hunting," January 4, 1851. Two contributions have been found in *Porter's Spirit of the Times*: "Game in the West," October 25, 1856; and "The Three Dakotas," a chapter from an otherwise unpublished work entitled "The Early Days of Minnesota," January 31, 1857.

these states of the Northwest as he saw them in the late seventies.⁴

A comprehensive picture of Minnesota as a sportsman's paradise is to be found in the numerous small items in both magazines describing fishing and hunting expeditions. Hunters shot elk, deer, wolves, rabbits, quail, partridge, woodcock, ducks, geese, curlew, plover, brant,⁵ grouse, prairie chickens, and other kinds of fowl; and fishermen obtained trout, pike, pickerel, black bass, catfish, sturgeon, and whitefish in the lakes and streams of the region.

Members of the Minnesota Historical Society will be interested to learn that J. Fletcher Williams, secretary and librarian of the society for twenty-six years, was a sportsman of no small repute. A description of a duck shooting expedition to Lake Koronis in Stearns County, on which he went with three other hunters, is contained in *Forest and Stream* for July 15, 1875. The writer of the account, one of the members of the party, describes the lake:

A beautiful sheet of water, miles in extent, with dense oak and maple forests extending down the sloping shores, and gracefully overhanging the water from a number of picturesque points. Numberless ducks dotted the surface of the lake, raising the expectations of our party in due proportion. To the east, and divided from Koronis by a narrow strip of land, the much talked of duck pass, lay Mud Lake, fairly alive with water fowl. . . . Among such surroundings it did not take long to select a suitable camping ground, and it being too early for the evening flight we busied ourselves making our camp snug and comfortable. Fine meadow grass, knee high, in which our steeds al-

⁴This series appears in the issues of *Forest and Stream* for October 18 to November 29 and December 6 and 13, 1877, and for January 3 to 24, 1878.

⁵There seems to have been and still to be some question as to whether the brant ever was found inland. Hunters, however, were evidently certain that they frequently obtained brant in the Northwest. A correspondent from Albert Lea writes in the February 28, 1878, issue of *Forest and Stream*: "I have seen in a late issue of your paper that some one is questioning the occurrence of the true brant away from salt water. We frequently kill them here. The Canada goose is very common here; next comes the brant (*Branta bernicla*), then the snow goose, white-fronted goose and Hutchins' goose. (I name them in the order of their number.)"

ready were luxuriating, made us a "scrumtious" bed, to use a favorite expression of W——, the well known Sec. of the State Historical Society, and a member of our party.⁶

While there are few illustrations in the magazine that relate to the Northwest, those that do occur are valuable. In the October 3, 1878, issue of *Forest and Stream* may be found two full-page engravings of the Minnesota state fair of that year and of the bench show and field trials held in connection with the fair. Hallock, who attended the fair, says:

There were to be seen aboriginal Indians with their implements of industry and weapons of the chase; furs, robes and hides, with the rude tools used in dressing them; stuffed specimens of wild animals; great structures created of the products of grain, which now grows luxuriantly on quondam buffalo ranges; wonderful implements of farm industry, doing the work of scores of men; steam threshers and self-binding harvesters, all showing the marvelous development of a very few years. Incidental and appropriate were the side shows, the team of elk in harness, the feats of wild horsemen in the saddle; the marvellous execution with rifle and shotgun; the rough riders, fox running, and coursing of hares. Scattered through all the great space, indoors and out, were the motley costumes of frontiersmen, voyagers, trappers, stock-raisers, soldiers, scouts, surveyors, half-breeds and Indians, all typical of the Far West and its recent change to civilization.

The student of agricultural history will be interested in the table of disbursements on and returns from a ten-thousand acre Minnesota farm for six years, which appears in *Forest and Stream* for March 21, 1878. The statistics were prepared by "a gentleman who has been in Minnesota for twenty-one years, and has not only planted grain over vast areas of prairie, but also numerous colonies of Swedish immigrants who are now well-to-do and prosperous." A few weeks later the editor announced that the table was "attracting earnest and widespread attention" and that the owner of the farm "beg[s] to refer to the advertisement

⁶A description of another game bird hunt that Williams accompanied is contained in an article entitled "Field Sports in Minnesota" in *Scribner's Monthly* for October, 1879.

printed in our paper under title \$30,000." The advertisement reads: "A gentlemen [*sic*] holding seventeen sections of the best grain land in Northwestern Minnesota, on the extension line of the St. Paul and Pacific R. R., wishes to find a capitalist with the above amount to join him in farming operations on an extensive scale."⁷

From these few illustrations it may be seen that magazines such as these provide a valuable source of information not only to the student of natural history, but to the social and economic historian as well.⁸

SELMA P. LARSEN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

⁷The editor's notice and the advertisement appear in the issue for April 18, 1878.

⁸Articles on sport in the Northwest also appeared frequently in literary as well as in other sporting magazines. See for example: "Autumn Game on the Prairies," in *Scribner's Monthly*, October, 1872; "Fishing and Hunting in the Northwest," in *Outing*, March, 1890; and Percy M. Cushing, "Echoes of the Wild Rice," in the *Outing Magazine*, September, 1912.



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](#).