

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

ST. PAUL IN 1849

WHEN THE "Dead Man" whose letters appear elsewhere in this issue made his Mississippi excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony in 1845 he described the landmarks and towns along the river, including the gray walls and keep of Fort Snelling. Quite beneath his mention, however, were the straggling group of shanties and whisky shops and a log chapel across the river on the east bank just a few miles below the fort. This little settlement, composed mainly of some thirty French-Canadian and Swiss families, in only three or four of which English was spoken, was too insignificant for even a "dead man's" notice. But four years later the Mississippi traveler could not overlook St. Paul, capital of the newly formed Minnesota Territory, center of all the activity and growth which this formation heralded. A St. Paul diarist recorded the smoke of eighteen chimneys one winter morning in 1848; by April the buildings had trebled and the population doubled. Seventy structures were erected during the first three weeks of May; logs that were in the boom at the Falls of St. Anthony one week were reported in the framework of St. Paul's new houses by the next. A handful of settlers had grown within a year to a busy town of 840 inhabitants.¹

Such was St. Paul in the fall of 1849, and it is not surprising that it figured frequently in the descriptions of a

¹ J. Fletcher Williams, *History of the City of Saint Paul and the County of Ramsey*, 202 n. (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4—St. Paul, 1876); Edward D. Neill to the American Home Missionary Society, April 30, 1849; *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), May 26, 1849; *Independent* (New York), December 6, 1848. Letters and reports relating to Minnesota in the papers of the American Home Missionary Society have been copied on film slides for the Minnesota Historical Society. The society has type-written copies of the items from the *Independent* cited herein.

later Mississippi excursionist, a Galena pastor who wrote a series of letters published in the *New York Independent* during the years 1849–51. These letters, sometimes labeled “From a Correspondent at the West” and sometimes signed with the initials “G.F.M.,” were probably all from the pen of the Reverend George F. Magoun, pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Galena, and later president of Iowa College at Grinnell, Iowa. Dr. Magoun was in St. Paul in September, 1849, and the following was doubtless written by him.² It is unsigned.

SARAH A. DAVIDSON

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

[From the *Independent* (New York), October 18, 1849.]

FROM A CORRESPONDENT AT THE WEST.

GALENA, ILL., Oct. 2, 1849.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE INDEPENDENT:

Those of your readers who wish to see our bolder western scenery in all its primitive grandeur may be abundantly gratified by a trip on one of the steam packets plying between this city and the new Territory of *Minnesota*. . . . So little has been done yet in the settlement of the country along the upper river, compared with its whole immense extent, that the traveler sees almost precisely the same scene beheld in part by Marquette and Joliet in 1673, when, after floating seven days down the Wisconsin, “they entered happily the Great River,”³—and beheld in full, seven years afterward by Father Hennepin, when he gave to the celebrated spot—which still retains

²In the *Independent* of June 21, 1849, the western correspondent referred to himself as a Galena pastor. The only pastor in Galena at that date with the initials G.F.M. was George F. Magoun. There are many other indications that Dr. Magoun was the author of the letters to the *Independent*. That “Brother Magoun Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church Galena” attended a lecture given by Neill in St. Paul on September 20, 1849, is recorded in the latter’s letter to the executive committee of the American Home Missionary Society, September 21, 1849. This date coincides with the information in the letter published herewith.

³This passage from Marquette’s narrative is translated as, “We safely entered Missisipi on the 17th of June, with a Joy that I cannot Express,” in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 59: 107 (Cleveland, 1900).

it—the name of the Falls of St. Anthony (of Padua.) There are still but few towns where, ten years hence there will be many. The beautiful lakes into which the rivers widen, wash shores that are almost as undisturbed by other sounds as they were a century ago; and the magnificent highlands that give character to the scenery are as they were when the French Jesuits first looked upon them with wonder. Great changes are beginning, but they are only beginning. . . .⁴

. . . The most majestic features of the scenery have disappeared; the limestone also which marks the lead region of Wisconsin and Illinois has disappeared, and a fine white sandstone takes its place. Sometimes this sandstone, rising perpendicularly from the water's edge, and covered with creeping vines, with here and there a pine tree rooted in the crevices, and hollowed and grooved below by the current, gives singular beauty to the banks. There is *St. Paul!* the capital of Minnesota at present, the point to which so many migratory thoughts have been directed during the past season. On a high bluff overlooking the river for many miles, and a large extent of country built, *or going to be built*, a mile long from the lower landing to the upper, and crowded to overflowing with the strangest mixture of people from all quarters, east, west, south and north; that is *St. Paul!* Let us leave the boat and look at life in Minnesota.

The Indian towns and stations that I have named are on the Iowa side of the river; St. Paul is on the Wisconsin or eastern side. It owes its origin to the fact, we were told, that the military reservation around Fort Snelling, at the mouth of the St. Peters, extended nearly to this point, and whisky traders located here by necessity. It takes its name from a little Catholic chapel built of logs—"St. Paul's Chapel." A member of the American Fur Company resides here, who was the first town proprietor, and is a man of enterprise and comprehensive views. He has just erected a large three story hotel,⁵ from which the American flag is flying yonder—and has given lots both for a church and a dwelling-house to the excellent missionary

⁴The three and a half paragraphs that are here omitted are devoted to an account of the trip up the Mississippi from Galena to the mouth of the St. Croix, up that stream to Stillwater, back through Lake St. Croix to the Mississippi, and northward past Kaposia.

⁵This was Henry M. Rice, who as early as April 28, 1849, was "very much identified with the growth and prosperity of St. Paul." His hotel was known as the American House. *Pioneer*, April 28, June 14, July 5, 1849.

sent hither by the A[merican] H[ome] M[issionary] Society.⁶ The rush of the whole population apparently to the boat is occasioned by the fact that she is the only regular steamer, and brings the weekly mail from Prairie Du Chien.⁷ Everybody is curious to see, too, who is coming to Minnesota. All kinds of goods, farming and household utensils, baggage, &c. are poured from the decks and hold of our steamer. Our Winnebago passengers, 25 in number, get their horses ready for their journey to their new location on the St. Peters river above.⁸ Their women attach their bags of provision and other burdens to large bands which pass over the forehead, and then trudge off. The half-breed lady yonder, who has been sitting in the cabin with so much of the air of civilized life passes out to the St. Anthony road, carefully wraps her bonnet in her handkerchief, swings her little girl upon her shoulder, *a la* pappoose and trudges off on foot with the rest. These are Dacotas or Sioux who come down the bluff wrapped in their blankets, and having evidently been so studious and careful at the toilet. Some of them wear red flannel leggins, are painted with hideous ingenuity, have feathers in their hair, and altogether are quite picturesque. These huge two-wheeled wooden carts standing in rows 200 in number, are from Lord Selkirk's settlement on the Red River of the North in the British Possessions. There is not a particle of iron about them. They are fastened together with

⁶The missionary was Neill, who, after a preliminary trip in April, arrived in St. Paul on July 12, 1849. A small lecture room for his use, which the *Pioneer* of July 19 had announced was about to be erected on a lot donated by Rice, was completed in the fall. It later became the First Presbyterian Church of St. Paul. Neill to the American Home Missionary Society, September 21, 1849; Neill, *Early Days of the Presbyterian Branch of the Holy Catholic Church in the State of Minnesota*, xvii-xix (Minneapolis, 1873).

⁷Coming "round the bend of the river on Thursday . . . with her pipe in her mouth," the "Senator" was the most eagerly awaited steamboat at the St. Paul levee, because, in spite of the *Pioneer's* demands for at least a triweekly service, this was the only boat bringing mail to the territory. The "Senator" was famous for its punctuality, but there were other steamboats making regular connections between Prairie du Chien and St. Paul. The *Pioneer* mentions the "Cora" and the two "Dr. Franklins." *Pioneer*, June 7, August 2, 16, 1849.

⁸An attempt was made to remove the Winnebago Indians, who were becoming a nuisance to white settlement in Iowa, and place them in Minnesota as a sort of buffer between the warring Chippewa and Sioux. For a full account of this transplanting, which began in the summer of 1848, see William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 308-320 (St. Paul, 1921).

wooden pins and thongs of green hide. The harnesses also are of wood and green hide. Many of them are drawn by a single ox harnessed to the vehicle like a horse. They have come seven hundred miles,—a journey of thirty days,—bringing buffalo robes, buffalo meat, moccasins, &c. to exchange for merchandise. Some of them have two horses or ponies, one only being driven at a time; the other following without a halter, and scarcely stopping to snatch a bite of grass. The barrels tumbling down to the landing are filled with cranberries, which are gathered by the Indians from the marshes in the vicinity. How the eyes of the housewives of Massachusetts would sparkle to see cranberries of such a size and flavor! Three thousand barrels will be shipped down the river this year, and the trade in them next season will be much heavier. The Indians who have gathered them have now gone to the small lakes for wild rice, a much better article than the S[outh] Am[erican] article of the market. The numerous articles of Indian manufacture in the stores would advertise us, if there were not so many blankets in the streets, that here civilized life and savage life come together. The moccasins wrought with the quill of the porcupine by the Ojibway women are truly beautiful. Many of the men we meet, Americans and French Canadians [*sic*], wear moccasins. Yet the good order of civilized life is apparent every where. . . .



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