

# Territorial Daguerreotypes

## BRIDGING THE MISSISSIPPI

*Edited by Bertha L. Heilbron*

HIDDEN AWAY in boxes of letters and other manuscripts, in scrap-books, in newspaper and magazine files, or in books of the mid-century can be found scores of contemporary writings which picture authentically the scenes and the events that were familiar to the people of Minnesota Territory. Rich in such accounts are the Minnesota Historical Society's collection of letters, newspaper clippings, programs, and similar materials accumulated by the numerous members of the Fuller family who migrated to Minnesota from Connecticut in the early 1850's.

There, for example, in the form of a clipping from the *New York Evening Mirror*, the following letter was discovered. Its writer, Jane Gay Fuller, joined her brother Alpheus in St. Paul in 1854. Before leaving her native state, she had acquired something of a reputation as an author. In Minnesota she traveled widely, collecting Indian legends and other local lore which, after returning to the East, she used in poems, short stories, and at least one novel, *Bending Willow: A Tale of Missionary Life in the Northwest* (New York, 1872).

The cousin to whom Jane addressed her letter was Hiram Fuller, a prominent journalist who owned and edited the *Mirror*. In June, 1854, he joined other members of his profession in an excursion celebrating the completion of the Rock Island Railroad's line between Chicago and the Mississippi River.<sup>1</sup> A feature of the trip was a steamboat voyage upstream from the end of steel at Rock Island to the head of navigation in Minnesota Territory. There Fuller saw the new towns of St. Paul and St. Anthony, and he visited with relatives who had recently settled in the territorial capital. Upon land-

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed account of "The Rock Island Railroad Excursion of 1854" by William J. Petersen, see *ante*, 15:405-420. Hiram Fuller is the subject of a sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 7:57.

ing at the St. Paul levee, he records in an editorial report prepared for the *Mirror*, "I had the good fortune to meet a couple of my fair name relatives with a sumptuous carriage and a splendid pair of horses, who took us in, and drove us around."<sup>2</sup> Fuller notes that "these ladies have been six weeks in St. Paul, long enough to be considered as 'old inhabitants,' and to become well posted up in regard to all its local wonders and beauties." One of his two guides was Jane Fuller, who was, in the journalist's opinion, "a poetess, but little known to fame."

That Jane should write to her cousin about the bridging of the Mississippi was natural, for when he crossed the river some eight months earlier, he pronounced "imminently perilous" the little rope ferry which took him to the west bank. As he passed through the rapid water above the falls, with "rafts of loose logs" floating about and "two carriages crowded upon the tottlish little ferry," Hiram Fuller realized nervously that the "lives of the passengers all hung upon a single rope." Doubtless he learned with relief that a bridge had been built. Experienced journalist that he was, he must have recognized that Jane's report of the opening of the first bridge to span the Father of Waters had news value. Thus he shared her chatty letter with readers of his newspaper.

Since the opening of the Suspension Bridge at St. Anthony was one of the spectacular and significant events of the territorial era, Jane Fuller's colorful report is here reprinted. It is offered as the first of a series of "Territorial Daguerreotypes" — contemporary pictures of Minnesota conditions and events from 1849 to 1858 — which will appear in this magazine from time to time as a feature of the Minnesota Territorial Centennial celebration.

<sup>2</sup> A clipping of Fuller's "Editorial Correspondence" written for the *Mirror* at St. Paul on June 8, 1854, is in the Fuller Papers. The report is reprinted in the *Minnesota Pioneer* of St. Paul for July 1, 1854.

[From the *Evening Mirror* (New York), February 16, 1855.]<sup>3</sup>

### FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT OF THE FAR WEST

ST. PAUL, M[innesota] T[erritory], Jan. 30th. [1855]

DEAR COUSIN:—But for a habit you have of reflecting my communications, full length, in your *Mirror*, I should be tempted to write a very merry letter this morning. Subject—Territorial Politics—a most excellent theme for a certain kind of dramatic composition, sometimes called FARCE.<sup>4</sup> But the *Mirror* readers would not look for anything of that sort from a lady's pen! No! certainly not! They would be shocked, as they ought to be. So I beg leave to inform them, that, in my opinion, a lady should never SAY POLITICS, when there is such a world of small talk for her tongue and pen.

Went out for a walk an hour since, although it was looking cloudy, and the air felt chilly and cold. It soon commenced snowing; but, like Cromwell going to battle, I marched on resolutely for a while to the music of a psalm. "He giveth snow like wool," I whispered! "He scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes! He casteth forth his ice like morsels! Who can stand before his cold?" Alas! not I, was the next mental exclamation. So turning back to our snug little parlor, the four rival *dailies* were searched most critically for a spice of news, but searched in vain. It is only the same thing (of which I am not going to write) hashed up, and served up in different party platters.<sup>5</sup> Next, the weekly CLOTHES-BASKET underwent a keen scrutiny, but luckily very little labor was requisite there for an industrious needle, and so I have two hours all to myself before dinner.

I think I have not written you since the advent of '55, which caused quite a stir in our north-western capital. St. Paul *will* be

<sup>3</sup> The date of the issue in which Jane Fuller's letter was printed and the name of the owner and editor of the *Mirror* were furnished by A. B. Evans, chief of the serials division in the Library of Congress. A file of the *Mirror* for 1855 is in that library.

<sup>4</sup> The writer probably refers to the fact that some members of the legislature of 1855, which convened on January 3, "organized the 'Third House' or *Sovereigns*, as a burlesque on the Legislatures of that day." See J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul*, 356 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4—St. Paul, 1876).

<sup>5</sup> The four daily papers published in St. Paul in January, 1855, were the *Minnesota Pioneer* and the *Democrat*, representing factions of the Democratic party, and the *Minnesotian* and the *Times*, which gave support to the Whigs or Republicans. See Daniel S. B. Johnston, "Minnesota Journalism in the Territorial Period," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10:270. The Minnesota Historical Society owns partial files of these papers.

slightly *Gothamitish* on occasions, and New Year's Day is one of such occasions. Universal calling has been the custom here ever since the town had a name and place on the map of the border. The pioneers, who launched into this enterprize some four or five winters since, when two hours sufficed to pass the compliments of the day with every white woman in town, must enjoy the change exceedingly; a change which has realised the dreams of the most visionary.<sup>6</sup> A hundred or two of houses were thrown open for receptions this year, and the gentlemen described the tables as loaded with every delicacy, from York Bay oysters to the fruits of the tropics; a strange contrast all this, to the quaint Red River teams one meets at every turn, or the straggling, half-starved Indians, with their silent appeals for charity.

There have been numerous festive gatherings of late, and the most interesting of all — the one still in the mouths of the multitude, was the opening of the Suspension Bridge — *the first bridge* (as every speaker on the occasion endeavored to impress on the audience) *which has ever spanned the old Father of Waters.*<sup>7</sup>

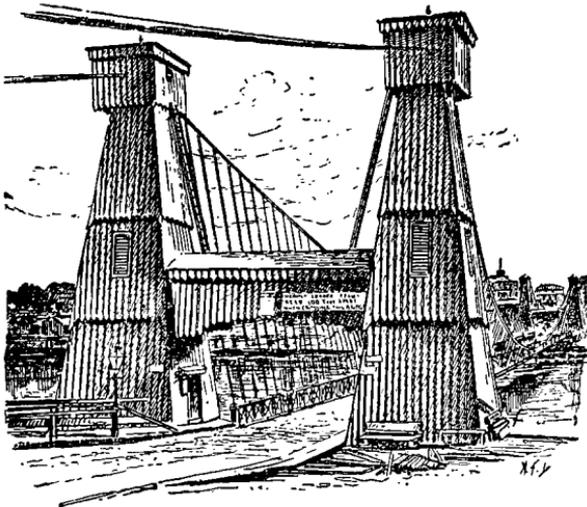
The event was celebrated on the 23d, at St. Anthony. It was really a proud day for Minnesota, and one which will long be remembered by both citizens and strangers who were fortunate enough to be present. The morning was one of beautiful brightness, and at an early hour the St. Paulites were out with their gayest teams and happiest faces, ready to go up and give the right hand of fellowship and pride to their neighbors of St. Anthony and Minneapolis.

The town was wide-awake on our arrival, and preparations making for the first grand, triumphal march of the East into the West. The procession was formed at the St. Charles, and consisted of a very long line of sleighs, (I dare not say how many as I did not

<sup>6</sup> As the writer relates, Minnesotans from New York and the East continued in their new homes the custom of paying calls on New Year's. Other pioneer celebrations of the holiday are described in an article on "Christmas and New Year's on the Frontier" by Bertha L. Heilbron, *ante*, 16:385-387.

<sup>7</sup> The Suspension Bridge of 1855 connected Nicollet Island with the infant settlement of Minneapolis on the west bank of the Mississippi. A crude temporary bridge was constructed somewhat earlier between the island and St. Anthony on the east bank. Thus the entire river was spanned for the first time. See "Old Suspension Bridge and Its Successors," in *Minneapolis Sunday Times*, April 21, 1901; John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People*, 260 (Minneapolis, 1890).

count them, and the reports differ so much).<sup>8</sup> One of mammoth size, with horses gaily decked, went forward with a band of music, and bearing aloft our national banner with its "Stripes and Stars," and then such music of sleigh-bells as followed, I am certain never before rose within the hearing of old St. Anthony.



THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE, 1855-72

[From the *Northwest Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 4, p. 15 (April, 1887).]

It was with most singular sensations I looked out upon the scene, watching the procession as it passed on over Nicollet Island to the gates of the bridge, which suddenly flew open, allowing it to pass on amid the cheers of the crowds, the thunder of the cannon, the bugle-blasts of the band, and the sullen roar of the frozen cataract,—under the evergreen arches, and over the first highway which has ever linked the Eastern and Western valleys of the Mississippi.

The structure is a very fine one; strikingly harmonious in its proportions, and corresponds beautifully with the character of the sur-

<sup>8</sup> The procession was "over a mile in length," according to Stevens; the *St. Anthony Express* of January 27, 1855, reports that "over 100 sleighs . . . were in line, embracing between five and six hundred persons." The route of the procession from the St. Charles Hotel in old St. Anthony, "down Main street and . . . over to Nicollet island," thence across the bridge and into Minneapolis, is described by Stevens. See his *Recollections*, 260.

rounding scenery. Literally, it is a *highway* in the wilderness, over which Civilization, in her onward march, will bear her lighted torches into the evening land of the West. Would like to furnish you with a more *scientific* description of this superb fabric, but unfortunately have little knowledge of mechanic laws. I only comprehended from the report, that the bridge is 620 feet span; that it has a roadway of 17 feet, and that its cost was \$36,000, the entire contribution of stockholders who reside in St. Anthony and Minneapolis, which last town has been built up almost entirely since you were here last June.<sup>9</sup>

There was an abundance of speechmaking after the return to the hotel; some of it replete with wit and enthusiasm. Mr. [L. M.] O[lds], (a friend of ours whom you met at the Capital last summer,) responded to the first regular toast in the liveliest, happiest manner. Would report his speech, but should only spoil it by attempting to render it in fragments.<sup>10</sup> There were other good specimens of Western oratory, "too numerous to mention" in a *short letter*, which I would write if I could.

The dinner was a failure, to say the least; consisting of a very pretty bill of fare, *on paper*, *French* to the eye, but *Winnebago*, or something else savage, to the taste;<sup>11</sup> and how so many good speeches were made on the strength of it, I could not divine.

We made a short drive home with the thermometer down in large figures below zero, but the zero of Minnesota, and the zero of New England IMPRESS one, very differently. There is something positively sublime in a genuine winter night in this climate, par-

<sup>9</sup> The dimensions of the span are confirmed in the *Express* for January 27, 1855, which also gives some of the details of its construction. The charter for the bridge was obtained from the territorial legislature in 1852; among the incorporators were residents not only of St. Anthony and Minneapolis, but of St. Paul and other Minnesota communities, as well as two citizens of Illinois. Government surveys on the west side of the Falls of St. Anthony "were made in 1854 preparatory to bringing the land into the market"; they accounted for the sudden growth remarked upon by Jane Fuller. In his report of June 8, 1854, Hiram Fuller makes no mention of Minneapolis, though he does comment upon St. Anthony. See Isaac Atwater, *History of the City of Minneapolis*, 349 (New York, 1893); Stevens, *Recollections*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> The toasts and speeches are reported in full in the *Express*, January 27, 1855. Olds was connected with the land office at Minneapolis.

<sup>11</sup> "Many got up hungry and dissatisfied," reads the report in the *Express* of January 27, 1855, not because food was lacking, but because the manager had failed to provide an "adequate corps of experienced waiters."

ticularly if out on the prairies. The heavens appear to be lifted up very high, and the earth to be spread out most magnificently wide; while the air is so clear and still, you listen to hear the stars sing, and might, perhaps, but for the *ear-mufflers*.

There is a great Indian excitement in town to-day. Last evening, *the* Chiefs of the Mississippi, Chippewas, arrived in "Full Feather," *en route* for Washington, where they go for the purpose of making a new treaty with Government. Hole-in-the-Day, Crow-Feather, Cross-in-the-Sky [*Crossing Sky*], and several other of the principal Chiefs are of the Delegation.<sup>12</sup> But this is not the cause of the excitement. A day or two since, the Sioux took another Chippewa scalp in this vicinity, and brought it into town for exhibition. Their victim, a brave fellow, was hunting alone near Rice Lake, when he was surprised by a large party of Sioux. He fought desperately, killed one man, and mortally wounded another, but fell at last overpowered by numbers; and his scalp was the occasion of a grand dance this morning, in front of the Central-House.<sup>13</sup>—Several hundred Sioux were on the spot, and their wild, exultant shouts were strange sounds in the midst of a busy city like this. No one had dreamed of their being here in such numbers until they started up in swarms to-day, from the bluffs and islands of the river, where it is thought by many, they have been lying in wait for the Chippewa Chiefs. Every Sioux is armed, and there is little doubt of their object, viz.: to obtain more scalps; and unless the Governor sends a company of soldiers down the river (of whom the Sioux entertain the most cowardly fear), there will rest a cloud of anxiety on the minds of those whose friends accompany the Delegation.

Adieu, J[ANE] G[AY] F[ULLER]

<sup>12</sup> The three chiefs named represented the Mississippi band; others were from the Pillager and Winnebagoish bands of the Chippewa. In Washington, on February 22, 1855, they signed a treaty by which vast sections of northern Minnesota were ceded to the United States. See William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:306, 324 (St. Paul, 1922); United States, *Statues at Large*, 10:1165-1171.

<sup>13</sup> The Central House was a hotel located on Bench Street, which extended along the bluff between Third Street and the river. The demonstration staged by the Sioux was merely another incident in a conflict of long standing between that tribe and the Chippewa. As late as 1853 they met on the streets of St. Paul in a fight which is described in Williams, *Saint Paul*, 336-338. For a more detailed account of the incident recorded by Miss Fuller, see the *Pioneer*, January 29, 31, 1855.



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