MINNETONKA, Minnetaga, Osakis, Kaseota, White Bear—these are only a few of the "Lakes of Minnesota" pictured by Edwin Whitefield in a folio volume found in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society. The work contains thirty-seven original water-color sketches of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the upper Mississippi in 1858 and 1859, each accompanied by a descriptive text inscribed, signed, and dated by Whitefield himself. The title page alone is printed. Both this and the binding of tan calf handsomely tooled in gold doubtless date from a period later than the pictures. Most of the sketches are in black and white delicately tinted with blue.

This unusual item of Minnesotiana was obtained in 1934 from Maggs Brothers of London, famed English dealers in rare books. Its acquisition by the society was made possible by the Herschel V. Jones bequest of 1925, which provides funds for the purchase of rare books and pictures.

Just how this Minnesota and upper Mississippi collection of the 1850s fell into the hands of an English book dealer in the 1930s has never been fully explained. Some clues are provided by Whitefield's own record. Of English birth, he returned frequently to his native land after establishing
himself in America as an artist. He went to Minnesota for the first time in 1856, when he was forty years of age, and he apparently retained his interest in the area until he died in 1892. As late as May, 1888, when planning a trip to England, he wrote to J. Fletcher Williams, librarian of the Minnesota Historical Society, to announce that "I shall do my very best to induce all the English farmers that I can to emigrate to Minn. . . . I have in years past been the means of sending many persons to Minn. and I have not the slightest doubt that I can do it again." At the same time, Whitefield reported that he had recently found some sixty of his Minnesota sketches, which he offered to the society "nicely mounted on bristol board, for three hundred dollars." Since the offer was rejected, it is possible that the artist took the sketches with him to England, and that among them were those purchased almost half a century later from Maggs Brothers.  

1 Whitefield to Williams, May 2, 14, 1888; Minnesota Historical Society Minutes, May 14, 1888, Minnesota Historical Society Archives.
The bulky volume in which the pictures are assembled affords far more than a visual approach to the “Land of Sky-blue Waters” of the 1850s. Although Whitefield was first of all an artist, he was also a practical businessman, deeply involved in land sales and town-site promotion. And it was business, rather than artistic considerations, that first drew him to Minnesota. There, in October, 1856, he helped organize the Kandiyohi Town Site Company “for the purpose of establishing several town sites.” A copy of its constitution is owned by the society, which also has in its collection a certificate signed by Whitefield for “one share in the Towns of Kandi and Yohi.” Both reflect the artist’s active interest in the settlement of the Kandiyohi lakes district. With some twenty companions, he explored this area in September, 1856, staking out several towns, one of which was named Whitefield.\(^2\)

The busy land agent, however, did not forget that he was first of all an artist. Fur-

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\(^2\) *Willmar Tribune*, May 27, 1917. There is still a Whitefield Township in Kandiyohi County.
Furthermore, he realized the value of pictures in promoting his business interests. Thus he displayed a collection of Minnesota landscapes at the territorial fair of 1856, and he took a large number of them with him when he left for the East in the late autumn of that year. According to the Minnesota Republican of November 13, 1856, this "Good Emigrant Agent" planned to enlarge some of his pictures and use them to illustrate a series of "lectures on Minnesota, which he intends giving in Eastern cities during the coming winter." The editor endorsed Whitefield's plans with enthusiasm. "We hardly know how any more successful method of advertising the attractions of the Territory could be devised," he wrote, "and we most cordially advise our eastern friends who wish to catch a glimpse of the Northwest without the trouble of the journey" to attend the artist's lectures "if he comes anywhere within their range."

In the months that followed, Whitefield not only lectured and painted, but he wrote glowing accounts of the Minnesota country. He sent articles to Harper's and the New York Tribune, and in the spring of 1857 he published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper an illustrated account of "A Trip from St. Anthony to Lake Minnetonka." 3

Evidence that Whitefield returned to Minnesota and continued his activities there in 1858 and 1859 is to be found in his collection of "Lakes of Minnesota." 4 There the artist expressed himself in water colors and wash drawings, and the settlement promoter spoke in the accompanying manuscript text, often embellished with tiny sketch maps. One Carver County lake Whitefield described as a "little gem . . . completely buried in the Big Woods." The area, he

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3 This article is reprinted, with an introduction by Philip D. Jordan, in Minnesota History, 30:111-121 (June, 1949). See also Whitefield to John H. Stevens, December 24, 1856, in the Stevens Papers owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

4 Apparently the artist hoped to publish this work as a book similar to those in his illustrated series on the Homes of Our Forefathers issued from 1879 to 1892.

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added, "is all settled up principally by Germans, and land can be bought for five or six dollars per acre." He recorded that near one lovely McLeod County lake, "fine grazing farms can be obtained ... at government prices"; and on the shores of another in Stearns County "there is only one settler, so that the country around is open to the next man that may think proper to step in and take possession."

He evaluated also lands close to the established settlements of St. Paul and Minneapolis. On White Bear Lake, he reported the land "is all owned, but at present very little improved," and it "can be bought for about 25 dollars per acre." The reader was warned that "This lake must not be confounded with the true and original White Bear Lake, which is situated about 75 miles west of St. Cloud on the Old Red River Trail, and which is five or six times as large as the Ramsey County one, and ten times more beautiful." Near Wayzata, on Lake Minnetonka, according to Whitefield, land could "be bought for cash for about 10 dollars per acre," and on the South Bay of the same lake it was available at "prices varying from three to five dollars." On Lake Calhoun, however, only five miles from Minneapolis, land was more valuable. There it was bringing "$50 per acre and in some cases as much as $100." These samples indicate something of the interest and significance of Whitefield's remarks. In his unique book, the society's library has a source of information that any student of frontier settlement and land values will find rewarding.

Whitefield seems also to have been aware that Minnesota's lakes would become an attraction for sportsmen. He related, for example, that the water of Lake Minnetonka "is clear, cold, and full of fish," and he stressed its "piscatorial wealth" in Leslie's. The lakes pictured by this artist of the 1850s are among the ten thousand which, in the course of a century, have made Minnesota a fishermen's mecca, drawing to it each summer tourists from every state in the Union.

on the Mississippi near Winona, 1859