DOMESTIC, social, and economic conditions in St. Paul of the 1850s are recalled by Amelia Ullmann in these extracts from her reminiscences. They constitute the third section of her recollections to appear in this magazine. Earlier installments in which she pictures the frontier St. Paul settlement and describes a trip to St. Louis and Chicago with her husband were printed in the spring issues for 1953 and 1954. Herein Mrs. Ullmann tells of her efforts to house, feed, and educate her growing family under frontier conditions; she presents glimpses of the Minnesota capital's physical growth and cultural progress; and she traces the expansion of her husband's fur and hide business in the eleven years that elapsed between her arrival in St. Paul in 1855 and the family's removal to Chicago in 1866.

To welcome his wife and baby son to their new home, Joseph Ullmann went to Hastings and boarded the steamboat on which they had traveled upstream from St. Louis. The little family landed in St. Paul on a quiet Sunday morning and drove, probably by stage, over a "rough, unpaved country road" to the hotel that was to be their home until more suitable quarters could be located. Their housing problem, as here described, suggests the situation faced by thousands of families in the years following World War II. With her arrival at the American House in May, 1855, Amelia Ullmann takes up her story.

NEAR what was then the end of Third street we stopped before a long, white, frame building the long side towards Third street and with an "L" at each end of the
rear. This, as a sign on the building indicated, was the American house, one of the principal hotels. The house was filled with guests, and the only room that the proprietor could place at our disposal was the little one that my husband had been occupying but had found too small for his own convenience.

In accordance with the usual plans of a frontier hotel the largest room on the second story was the “Ladies’ Parlor,” the other rooms, all small and plainly furnished and built upon both sides of a long, narrow hallway, were the guests’ sleeping rooms. On the first floor the barroom was upon one side of the hallway that was entered through the main doorway from the front and the dining room was on the other. Upon neither of these rooms was much decoration expended; they were intended more to serve their purpose of furnishing food and drink than to be ornamental.

Four large and two small tables were arranged so as to seat the greatest possible number of persons in the dining room. As one of the “steady boarders,” I was assigned a seat at one of the smaller tables. Some of my fellow boarders who afterwards became identified with the growth of St. Paul I remember were Mr. Maenninger [John Nininger] and his wife, a sister of Governor [Alexander] Ramsey; Charles Elfelt, a merchant; and banker Etchardson [Erastus S. Edgerton] his wife and sister. The bill of fare of the first day’s meals was with little variations that of the succeeding days; bacon, potatoes, biscuits, tea for breakfast and supper, soup and a pie made from dried fruit were the additions that distinguished dinner, the midday meal, from the other two. Fresh meat, fruit, vegetables [sic] were too great luxuries for a hotel table.

Hoping soon to be in a house of our own, I tried hard to content myself and for weeks partly succeeded. The river was low and lumber being difficult to obtain, no houses were built. My husband found it even impossible to secure a store room and was permitted through the courtesy of Mr. Constans [William Constans] a small space in his warehouse for the storage of his goods. Days passed and grew into weeks and months and the promised house appeared no nearer than the day I arrived.

The hotel continued crowded to its utmost capacity; frequently we were solicited for a loan of an old sofa in our room to make a bed for some weary late arrival.

Life in the little stuffy room under the hot sun became so miserable that one evening I rushed out of the hotel and went myself to the row of shanties near by enquiring if any of the occupants could direct me to a house that was to be rented. My earnestness and the character of my inquiries among these lowly people startled them and they looked at me as if they thought that I was mad. One crumbling old shanty with a flight of crazy steps leading up to the front door and a place in which even these poor people would not live, was pointed out as the only house to be rented in St. Paul. Late one evening in August a man whom we had commissioned to get a house for us, came excitedly into the hotel and said that if my husband would accompany him immediately he might be able to secure a house.

In a few days we moved into the second story of a white frame house in the rear of the American house. Only a conscientious housewife, only a devoted mother who had lived in St. Paul in those days knows all the inconveniences and miseries that I was forced to endure in my efforts to do what I felt to be my duty. No servants, no house help of any kind was to be obtained. Every drop of water used had to be carried.
across the prairie from a well in a livery stable back of the American hotel; and to get this it was necessary to crowd in among drivers and rough men from the prairies. My child was ill much of the time from lack of proper nourishment, for good, wholesome food was difficult to obtain. Fresh vegetable and fruit were unknown. These things being brought up from St. Louis by the boats, they were often in such a condition upon their arrival at St. Paul that their use would have been deleterious to health.

Weary of bacon, potatoes and tea, I went one day to my poor neighbors and asked if there be a market in St. Paul. There was, they said, and directed me to the market house that was across the prairie at some distance from my home. By making many inquiries, I found the place of the market, a two story almost square brick building without anything that would identify it as a place where food was sold. There were no stands nor market wagons in the space around the building. The interior would have been entirely empty but for two stands where butchers were endeavoring to dispose of a poor quality of meat at a high price. As I came out of the building I met a woman carrying some butter and cheese; and, when I found that she had these for sale, I greeted her as if she were an old friend. The woman said that she was the owner of the only cow in town and agreed to furnish me weekly with milk and butter. . . .

In the apartment to which we had moved were left several pieces of furniture that the former occupants generously placed to our use. The first night made clear the reason of their removal and also of their generosity. Everything was so alive with those terrors to good housekeeping, bed bugs, that it was not only impossible to sleep but even to exist in the same room with such a myriad of earlier claimants. We retreated before the swarm to an apartment on the first floor a few days afterwards. This was somewhat better, but when one of my neighbors confided to me that the previous summer five persons had died in the house from cholera, I determined to get away from it, cost whatever inconvenience it might.

In the meantime my husband had by chance secured a store room on Jackson street and into a little room back of the salesroom we made the third change of residence within two weeks. From rough pine boards my husband built a little addition that we used as a kitchen, and later on we were given the use of one of the rooms on an upper floor as a sleeping room. Even though our quarters here were limited and lacked most of the conveniences and many of the comforts, yet they possessed some of the elements of a home. The experiences, too, that I had already gone through had taught me, as it had many another woman who, had left the comforts of civilization to go into the new lands of the Great West, that many vexations and priva-
tions must be nobly born. I thus found myself becoming more contented with the conditions as I found them.

MORE STRANGERS arrived [in 1857] than the preceding Spring and the town became very lively and active. Every person appeared to have money which was mostly in coin, and they spent it freely. There was, too, a change for the better in the market as well as in the stock of goods offered for sale in the stores; we were in the first transitory state of development from the conditions of a frontier settlement to those of a town in whose permanence the inhabitants were beginning to believe.

8 Since she was writing almost forty years later, it is not surprising that Mrs. Ullmann does not always recall accurately the year in which an event occurred. The Ingersoll Block, for example, was not built until 1860. J. Fletcher Williams, A History of the City of Saint Paul, 393 (Minnesota Historical Collections, vol. 4 – St. Paul, 1876).
9 James E. and Horace Thompson arrived in St. Paul later than is here indicated, one coming in 1859 and the other in 1861. In 1862 they opened a bank which soon became the First National Bank of St. Paul. Their careers are covered in Frank P. Donovan, Jr., and Cushing Wright’s history of the First National Bank, soon to be published.
11 The Athenium was built in 1858 by the German Reading Society on the corner of Walnut and Exchange streets, according to Henry A. Castle, History of St. Paul and Vicinity, 2:487 (Chicago, 1912). For an account of the theatricals held there, see Hermann E. Rothfuss, “The Early German Theater in Minnesota,” in Minnesota History, 32:101–105 (June, 1951).
12 The Nicollet House opened on May 28, 1858, and the event was marked by a lavish banquet with speeches by Henry H. Sibley and other notables. The Fuller House was completed almost two years earlier, in September, 1856. Williams, Saint Paul, 365; Isaac Atwater, ed., History of the City of Minneapolis, 324 (New York, 1893).
13 The Temperance House was erected in 1848 or 1849 in a ravine on the corner of Fourth and Jackson streets, according to Andrews, St. Paul, 519. Charles Colter’s building was located at Fifth and Jackson, where the Ullmanns also lived. For notes on Colter, see Minnesota History, 33:195, 197 (Spring, 1953). An account of early changes in the levels of St. Paul streets is given in Castle, St. Paul, 1:174.

Lumber, floated on the high water, was plentiful and new buildings were begun in every part of the town. On Third street opposite Minnesota the Ingersoll[1] building was put up; in the upper story was a large hall for public gatherings. For several years this remained the largest assembly room in the town, and was the scene of most of the important public meetings in the early history of St. Paul. At the corner of Seventh and Jackson, Mr. Langley built the largest stable in the territory. The Messrs. Thompson Brothers were among this year[s] arrivals; they opened a commercial bank on Third street below Minnesota. Echardson and McCobin’s [Mackubin and Edgerton’s] bank was opened on the same street above Minnesota. Among the good residences built was that of Mr. Fairbanks on Seventh street. Out on the Fort Snelling road the German citizens built a meeting place to which they gave the name the Athenium. It was a one story frame structure, plainly built, and on the inside unplastered. A temporary stage was put in one end and amateur theatricals were sometimes attempted. The Athenium soon became [one of] the most popular gathering places for the Germans of St. Paul.

At Minneapolis this year was opened that city’s first big hotel, the Nicollet House. The occasion was celebrated with much the same enthusiasm as the opening of the Fuller House in St. Paul. Many invitations were sent to St. Paul people. We drove over in the evening and returned after the dinner and ball delighted with the hospitality of our sister city.

An effort was this year made to grade and pave the streets. The principal thoroughfares were all put in a very good passable condition. In the improving of Jackson street we were one of the sufferers; for the Coulter building was about fifteen feet above the street level. The Temperance house, a block away, was the same distance below the street level, and in making the improved way earth was filled in to the height of the first story. When the street...
was cut through a flight of wooden stairs was built up to the front of the Coulter building; but soon the earth loosened beneath the foundation and the walls becoming insecure we were forced to leave the house.

SO FAR in the rush and hurry of business and the building of a new city St. Paul had had very little time to devote to things artistic. But now as the town had become more settled and as we were passing from a Territory into a State there was more time to give to thoughts upon art and culture. People in their buildings paid more attention to architectural details exteriorly and more decorative taste in the interiors. In the summer of 1857, in recognition of his services to the Territory, the citizens of St. Paul determined to have the portrait of Governor Mederia [Medary] painted and hung in the Capitol building. As yet, though, there was no competent artist in St. Paul and the order was given to Mr. [T. C.] Healy of Chicago.9 The sittings were in one of the rooms of the Capitol where the artist could have a suitable light for his work and be at the same time where the Governor could with the least inconvenience come. The portrait that was painted was satisfactory to the committee that had been selected to look after the matter. We took advantage of the presence of Mr. Healy in St. Paul to have portraits of members of the family painted.10 These were the first oil portraits ever made by an artist in the town. Mr. Healy became quite well acquainted and his influence in this early visit had not a little to do with the development of an artistic taste among the rising generation.

There appeared, too, this year another class of arrivals that became more numerous as the town was better fitted to care for them. They were invalids, mostly men, who afflicted with various forms of pulmonary diseases, had been advised by physicians to try the pure, bracing air of the Northwest. Many of these on account of the insufficiency of the accommodations at hotels or boarding houses it was often our pleasure to entertain. Warm friendships were in this way formed and often in after years and in other cities was there a reciprocation of the entertainment by persons to whom the climate and air of St. Paul had given a new lease of life.11

IN THE SPRING of 1858 it was necessary on account of illness that I have a change of climate, and in May in company with my husband and young son I started for Europe. The state of Wisconsin was then crossed by a railroad from La Crosse to Milwaukee;12 and it was no longer obligatory in order to reach Chicago to go to either Dubuque or Galena. . . .

The ride over the new railroad was slow and full of uncertainties. Six days were required to reach New York and from there to Havre, France, fifteen days. Remittances began to come slowly and irregularly after we had been a short time in Europe, and we felt in far away Alsace the shock of banks and business houses that were falling in the financial crisis at the time sweeping over the United States.13 It became imperative in order to protect his business interests that my husband return home. . . .

9 Samuel Medary was governor of Minnesota Territory from April, 1857, until the new state was admitted to the Union in May, 1858. Thomas Cantwell Healy was a brother of the more famous portrait painter, George P. A. Healy. The latter's studio was in Chicago. Information on T. C. Healy was kindly furnished by David H. Wallace of the New-York Historical Society. The portrait of Medary has not been located.

10 The portrait of Mrs. Ullmann painted on this occasion, signed "T. C. Healy, 1857," is reproduced on page 96. It was presented to the Minnesota Historical Society in December, 1953, by Mrs. Ullmann's granddaughter, Mrs. Lawrence J. Ullmann of Tarrytown-on-Hudson, New York.


12 The La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad was completed to La Crosse in 1858, according to Williams, Saint Paul, 385.

13 If the Ullmanns returned to the United States as a result of a financial panic, they must have gone abroad in 1857 rather than in 1858.
What first struck me was the wonderful change that had come over the town; business was paralyzed, houses had been stopped in the course of construction, banks and prominent business men had failed, public and private improvements were at a standstill and the people appeared to be in the depth of discouragement and despondency. This was the beginning of the years of depression that followed; disaster piled upon disaster until their weight buried in gloom and sorrow not only many homes but the whole community.

In the Autumn we moved into a two story frame house which we had had for some time under course of construction beyond Seventh street. This part of the town had been gradually improving and many hand-

"Although Mrs. Ullmann here reports that she moved into her new home in the fall of 1858, not only her family, but Prince and Sibley, were living in local hotels as late as 1859, according to the St. Paul Directory for 1858—59. By the time the City Directory of 1863 appeared, however, all were occupying residences on Eighth and Ninth streets, north of Seventh.

JULY 4, 1860, on the very eve of the great civil war, was celebrated with all the patriotic fervor and enthusiasm for which the early settlers of Minnesota were prominent. The companies of the state militia of St. Paul and neighborhood in all the brightness of new uniforms and new arms, the five companies, and the local lodges and organizations with music, flags and banners paraded through the streets and then marched out to a picnic grove near our house. Many of the paraders crowded into our house in a genial, good natured way and proceeded in the same spirit to take possession. The clamorings of such a crowd for something to eat and drink we found ourselves not at the instant prepared to satisfy. But a barrel of beer and such eatables as could on this short notice be obtained we
set before them on tables under trees in the yard. Their appreciation was so great that we were favored by a serenade from the band; while Mayor Prince who had invited to a dinner only the members of a “swell” special company was passed unnoticed by the celebrators.

The Fourth of July the following year was spent by many of us at White Bear Lake which even at that early time was beginning to develop into a pleasant summer resort. We loaded into a big wagon plenty of provisions and beer, took along a band of musicians and as a thoroughly congenial company set out at 4 o’clock in the morning. The day was so clear and bright the air so fresh and buoyant that the ride of three hours was most enjoyable. The day passed quickly in boats upon the lake, in resting beneath the trees and upon the grass along the shores. Our dinner we spread on the grass of the largest island and ate with a hearty appetite. In the evening we had a ball at Mr. Lieb’s [Leip’s] hotel, which was then only a plain frame structure near the lake, and rode back to St. Paul in the moonlight.

THE CLOUDS that had hung so dark and lowering over St. Paul cleared as the smoke floated away from the battle fields of the South. The Sun and Prosperity began, at first feebly to shine through the gloom, and, then sent the full effulgence of its rays upon the young city. Confidence returned; business revived; improvements public and private, were commenced, and the town started upon the era of growth and development that ended in the St. Paul of today.

The revival of business brought new and interesting phases in the commercial life of the town. With development came new industries and new people to conduct them; older enterprises must be increased to meet new demands and improved and different methods of management were required. This I found exemplified [sic] in interests with which we at that time found ourselves concerned. That St. Paul should be a fur dealing point appeared not unnatural on account of its nearness to the great fur producing districts of the Northwest. From the very earliest times in its history furs and hides had been sold or exchanged there. The trade was, however, neither regular nor systematic, being to a great extent the barter at the general store or the hat and cap manufacturer of furs by trappers or Indians for food, clothing and hunting material. It was really not until the year 1858 that the foundation for the present extensive trade was laid. As my husband was so largely instrumental in bringing this about, I shall take the liberty of explaining how a business that is known all over the world was established.

Most of the fur dealer[s] in St. Paul—men who had become rich not so much through their business as from the fortunate possession of desirable real estate, but who appeared to think that furs was the early source of their wealth—had gotten their knowledge of the quality of furs from their acquaintance with and life among Indians and trappers. Some of the most expert judges were men who had spent years among the red men, learnt their language, customs and had practically become one of them by marriage into the tribe. To these men the knowledge of furs was intuitive; they merely “picked it up”, not knowing or caring either where or how.

My husband began as a man and without any previous knowledge; for in his early business career he could not distinguish good from bad, or, as has since been remarked, a mink from a muskrat. Mr. Werthun, a German who had learnt something of furs from buying muskrat and other small skins from farmers and trappers near St. Paul, gave him his first instruction.

In 1858 after our return from Europe, he began making his first purchases. They were upon such a limited scale that it was not considered necessary to have a warehouse; there was room enough in the house to store them all. Our first consignment of
furs was sent to Charles Hamilton, a dealer in hats and caps, who had come from Chicago to solicit trade from St. Paul. The interest that was thus developed soon attracted dealers from outside of St. Paul and we had as a rival in the purchase of furs a Mr. Brumley [Henry Bromley], agent for the New York house that supplied the great wholesale firm operated by Sir Lam[p]son of London.15

The product of the country immediately around St. Paul was neither large nor good; it was confined mostly to the smaller skins such as minks and muskrats. What gave the city its standing as a market was the yearly visits of the trappers from the Red river district;16 they brought with them the season's catch in this section so rich in the finer, larger, better fur bearing animals. But the opening up of the country north of St. Paul made in course of time these journeys unnecessary, and then agents were sent to buy the products from the trappers themselves.

One of the most useful and skillful of the men engaged in this hard occupation was “Dave” Smith, a true New England Yankee with all the keenness and alertness that is generally credited to these shrewd people. With a wagon a team of horses and one companion, he started early in the Spring for the Red River country. He carried along tents, blankets and such other things as he thought might be necessary in the wild, sparsely settled land. The huts of the trappers were often far apart, through swamps and wildernesses where no road had yet been made. Smith would be gone for months upon these expeditions. He had many regular customers, trappers who from the recurrence of his trips had learnt to expect him and would hold their furs awaiting his arrival. The life was a trying one full of adventures. . . .

Travel by wagon to the north was later much shortened as the railroad in that di-

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15 The corrected names are written in pencil above the line in the manuscript. Bromley is listed in the St. Paul City Directory for 1863 as a fur dealer, whose place of business was at Third and Jackson streets. Sir Curtis Miranda Lampson was deputy governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, according to Debrett's Illustrated Baronette, 389 (London, 1872).

16 On the annual treks of the Red River cart trains from the Canadian Red River settlements to St. Paul and their importance to the frontier capital, see Williams, Saint Paul, 304-308.
rection was constructed. This, too, lead to a change in the shipping point to Chicago and the eastern market; for as more direct connections were established it became no longer necessary to take the products to St. Paul for shipment to the more important markets. St. Paul as a fur market thus changed as the means of communication with the fur producing lands to the north varied. I shall not say more as regards the increase in the business until in 1870 one branch, that of hides, was the largest in the United States; nor how the fur trade grew until there were branches in all the largest cities of the world. The development of the business was one of the causes that finally lead to our leaving the city where it had been so humbly begun and established.

BESIDES matters of business there was another cause that operated to influence a conscientious parent with several boys and girls in making a change of residence. The schools of St. Paul, which today are distinguished for their excellence, were extremely primitive. My experience was not unlike that of many another mother who at that time was striving to prepare her children to fight well and intelligently with the conditions of society and of life that she felt they would be forced to meet in the development of this new country.

When my oldest boy was five years of age, he was sent to an old lady who received at her home in Eight[th] Street children of the neighborhood and gave them the most elementary instructions. The school was not the kindergarten of the present time, but was a kind of forerunner of the present American system of private elementary education. The twenty or more little pupils were taught knitting, simple drawing, deportment, recitations. One of the effects of the system I observed when my boy told me that he knew New York because it was blue on the map at his school—that appeared to be the extent of his information upon the subject.

In his sixth year I was very anxious to have him in a school where he could be given elementary instruction. To Mr. Hoelderhoff, who had a private school on Eight[h] street, he was then sent for his first teaching from books. He had been there a short time when Major Dyke, an acquaintance who was much attached to the boy, prevailed upon us to send him to the Seminary at Faribault, to which a few years ago was attracted so much attention in the religious world through the discus-

"By 1904, when the firm Joseph Ullmann founded in St. Paul marked its golden anniversary, its headquarters were in Leipzig, Germany, and it had branches in such cities as London, Paris, New York, and Chicago, as well as in Canada, Australia, and China. The history of the business in outlined in a book issued to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary—*Denkschrift zum 50jährigen Geschäftss--Jubiläum* (Leipzig, 1904). The pictures of Ullmann's St. Paul and Chicago business houses appearing herewith are reproduced from this volume.

Robert Holterhoff was the proprietor of a "select school" located on Wacouta between Eighth and Ninth streets, according to the St. Paul City Directory for 1863."
The child was now eight years of age and was without even a beginning in elementary education. We had made a trial of all the means in St. Paul and its vicinity and they had all proved unsuccessful. As a last resort his father took the boy with him when next he went to New York City. Here also an acquaintance had generously agreed to look after the young pupil, to see that he was well cared for and to start him homeward in case of homesickness. The following year the boy was found by his father to be in almost as sorry, neglected plight as at Faribault and he was brought back to St. Paul. The best school there was that of Mr. Hoelderhoff and the boy began again under his instruction.

The experience had throughout been as unpleasant to me as the education had been unsatisfactory to the child. I had no fondness to make such experiments with my other children. My husband was now on account of his business half of his time in either New York or Chicago, and it became necessary in order that he could attend properly to his affairs and at the same time that our family life could be preserved that we leave St. Paul. I had been through the trials of a frontier settlement and had suffered many of its hardships to find that when about to begin the enjoyment of the benefits of its growth and improvement, I must go away.

In St. Paul my children with one exception had been born, my mother and one of my children were buried there, and there I had made many intimate friends. Not only had I seen the frontier village grow into a thriving, progressive city; but I had taken a lively interest in its progress; there had not been a church built to which we had not contributed, nor an enterprise to the advantage of the town that we had not given our aid. I felt thus not only a pride in its growth but a sort of interest in its enterprises; and it was with a feeling of no little regret that I was told in March 1865 that my husband had sold our house and that we should prepare to go to Chicago.

Mrs. Ullmann here refers to what was known as the Faribault plan, or the Stillwater plan. It was instituted in 1891, and it represented an attempt to unite the Catholic parochial schools of the communities with their free public school systems. The plan, which was discontinued after arousing a storm of controversy, was in no way identified with the pioneer Faribault school of the 1860s. William W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota, 4:174-183 (St. Paul, 1930).