

MORTON S. WILKINSON probably was photographed in Brady's studio between 1859 and 1865, when he was in Washington as a senator from Minnesota. He also served as a congressman from 1869 to 1871.

## *Mathew Brady's*

# PORTRAITS of PROMINENT MINNESOTANS

BERTHA L. HEILBRON

ALTHOUGH Mathew Brady has long been appreciated for his pictorial record of the Civil War, his importance as "history's cameraman" has only recently received full recognition. In a newly published biography, based largely upon hitherto unavailable sources, James D. Horan characterizes Brady as a man "who used a camera as Bancroft did his pen." As early as 1845, Mr. Horan reports, "Brady began work on the tremendous project of preserving for posterity the pictures of all distinguished Americans, which he planned to publish in a massive volume." The work never appeared in print, but in assembling material for it the pioneering photographer did succeed in portraying most of the prominent figures of his day. As a result, writes Mr.

Horan, "It is hard to find any great American . . . who was not attracted by his [Brady's] offer to lead him or her by the hand before his camera and into history."<sup>1</sup>

Samples of Brady's portrait work have long been present in the picture collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, giving evidence that many a visitor from Minnesota posed before his camera. The familiar imprint of Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries in New York and Washington is to be found on the back of numerous items in the society's vast collection. To it recently were added more than a dozen Brady likenesses, including those here reproduced. They were made from original negatives, some of them cracked and other-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Horan's biography of *Mathew Brady: Historian with a Camera* was issued with more than five hundred illustrations late in 1955 (244 p.) For the passages quoted, see p. 9-11.

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wise damaged, in the National Archives in Washington.<sup>2</sup>

The Brady collection now in the National Archives comprises about six thousand original negatives as well as several series of copy negatives on film and photographic prints made by Brady and his assistants. It was purchased by the war department in 1874, when the photographer was bankrupt, and was transferred to the archives by the secretary of war in 1941. Most of the Minnesota portraits in the collection probably date from the 1860s, and it seems certain that all were made in the photographer's Washington gallery, which was opened about 1858. Several of the Minnesotans pictured, including Governor Alexander Ramsey, are shown seated in the so-called "Lincoln chair," which was "one of the most familiar 'properties'" of the Washington studio.<sup>3</sup>

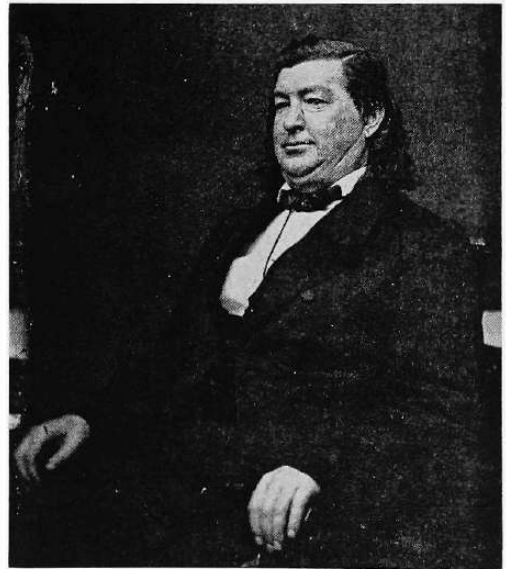
All the Minnesotans represented in the National Archives' Brady collection figured in the political life of the frontier state, and most of them were at some time members of Congress. Thus their presence in Washington and their visits to Brady's gallery are easy to explain. It seems more than likely, however, that many more residents of the North Star State were photographed by Brady or his assistants in the Washington gallery. Thus it would be strange indeed if some Minnesota portraits were not included in the photographic files acquired by his nephew and heir, Levin C. Handy, when Brady died in 1896. These materials, with the files accumulated by Handy himself as a practicing photographer up to the

<sup>2</sup> These pictures were selected by the writer in 1954 from some twenty-five Brady portraits of Minnesotans found in the Still Pictures section of the National Archives' Audio-Visual Records branch. When several likenesses of the same subject were present, the best examples were chosen, and duplicates of portraits already in the society's collection were excluded. The copies acquired were purchased from a special fund provided through the generosity of Mr. Carl W. Jones of Minneapolis.

<sup>3</sup> Josephine Cobb, Still Pictures section, National Archives, to the writer, May 9, 1955; Roy Meredith, *Mr. Lincoln's Camera Man: Mathew B. Brady*, 66, 78, 90 (New York, 1946).



ALEXANDER RAMSEY, first governor of Minnesota Territory, probably sat for this portrait between 1863 and 1875 while he was representing the state in the United States Senate. From 1879 to 1881 he was in Washington as secretary of war in President Hayes's cabinet.



BRADLEY B. MEEKER was an associate justice of the territorial supreme court from 1849 to 1853. Meeker County is named for him.



THIS likeness of the youthful Ignatius Donnelly may well have been made while he was representing Minnesota in Congress from 1863 to 1869.

time of his death in 1932, were purchased from the latter's daughters by the Library of Congress in September, 1954. Comprising some ten thousand items, the collection spans nearly a century, beginning as it does with examples of Brady's work in the early years of photography in the 1840s. The Brady-Handy collection is subject to certain restrictions and cannot be used without special permission until 1964. Mr. Horan, however, was privileged to draw upon it, and his book is the first to reveal its riches.<sup>4</sup>

Herewith are reproduced portraits of a few Minnesotans who posed in the "operating room" of Brady's famous gallery at 627 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. It is believed that none of these photographs has been previously published. All have been made available through the courtesy of the National Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Horan, *Mathew Brady*, xiii, xiv. For a description of "The Brady-Handy Collection" by Hirst D. Millhollen, see the Library of Congress, *Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions*, 13:135-142 (May, 1956). The collection has been organized into thirty-five series, described in this article.



STEPHEN MILLER was prominent in the Civil and Indian wars, attaining the rank of brigadier general. He was governor of Minnesota in 1864 and 1865. This photograph may have been made as late as 1876, when Miller was in Washington as a presidential elector.



WILLIAM WINDOM, a Winona lawyer, served as a congressman from 1859 to 1869 and as a senator from 1871 to 1881. He was later secretary of the treasury under Garfield and Harrison.



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