

# A “Foreign View” of Minnesota’s Future

IN 1865, with the close of the Civil War, the United States stood on the threshold of its final great wave of westward expansion. Within twenty years this would culminate in the conquest and virtual disappearance of the American frontier and in the private fortunes that made a legend of the “Gilded Age.” Yet even this reality was frequently dwarfed by the dreams of promoters. The way in which these visions fed upon each other is illustrated by a lengthy article which appeared in the *St. Paul Press* of November 3, 1865. It was reprinted from the *London Railway Record* of October 14 and purported to show “A Foreign View” of Minnesota’s commercial position. Yet the *Railway Record* had taken its facts (and much of its prose) directly from a promotional book, *Minnesota: Its Progress and Capabilities* (St. Paul, 1862), by none other than the editor of the *Press*, Joseph A. Wheelock.

The English paper capped its extravagant predictions concerning Minnesota’s future with the following lyrical passage, quoted from page 21 of Wheelock’s book: “Through Minnesota, the sole pathway of westward emigration, must flow the great exodus now dashing itself in vain against the shores of Europe through the passes of the Caucasus. Every advancing wave of population lifts higher and higher this gathering flood of

American life, which, the moment that it begins to press upon the means of subsistence, must pour all its vast tide through this narrow channel into the inland basins of the northwest—till the Atlantic and Pacific are united in a living chain of populous States.

“This is but the outline, faintly limed upon the canvas, of the empire into which is to be wrought the glory and the grace of all historic civilizations. Progress is no longer a superficial diffusion, but an inward growth, of which no width but depth is the measure. The movement of life is turned from the circumference to the centre. The reciprocal dualism of the east and west, of the north and south—their action and reaction—becomes a continental economy. The social life of the new world ceases to be a fragment—a broken echo of old-world traditions—and becomes a complete and rounded continental organism, at once independent and supreme, of which Minnesota is the vital centre—the heart from which all its arteries pulsate to the majestic systole and diastole of the commerce of the world.”

“If we are not mistaken,” concluded the *Railway Record* hopefully, “this great work will be a leading enterprise of the coming year.”





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