

MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS¹

In the spring of 1887 Charles Beadle, an Englishman, made an American tour in the course of which he visited the South, crossed the continent, went north to British Columbia, and returned to the East by way of Manitoba and Minnesota. His primary object was "to see what our go-ahead friends on the other side of the Atlantic are like in their own country, and to pick up as much useful information as I can from them." During his travels he faithfully recorded his impressions in a diary, which was privately printed after his return to England. One passage, in which he tells of his journey through Minnesota in the latter part of May, 1887, is an interesting brief record of the things which an intelligent foreigner, who was making a brief survey, considered noteworthy in the state, and it is herewith reprinted. A copy of Beadle's book is in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

AN ENGLISHMAN IN MINNESOTA, 1887

[Charles Beadle, *A Trip to the United States in 1887*, 157-164 (Privately printed, n.p., 1887)]

May 29th [1887] — On the train from Winnipeg to St. Paul we met a very intelligent Scotch farmer, who had been in the States thirty-seven years. He farms a large farm south of St. Paul, which he said had now nearly worked itself out by continual wheat crops, and he had just bought a section, 640 acres, on the northern border of Minnesota, which he cropped entirely

¹ Beginning with this number of MINNESOTA HISTORY, a section of the magazine will regularly be devoted to reprints of interesting contemporary descriptions from Minnesota's past, drawn from travelers' reports which are out of print or inaccessible to the average reader. It is hoped that the accounts printed in this section will interest not only the general readers of the magazine but also teachers of Minnesota history who desire illustrative materials for class use. *Ed.*

with wheat. He said he and his four sons did most of the work; that they ploughed with four horses eleven hours a day, turning a 14-inch furrow; that in the flat country there was nothing to hinder the cultivation. They never hoed the wheat, and in fact did nothing but roll it until harvest, when he had to pay men 8s. a day; but that he got good work out of them for this, as they had to move with the machines, which were driven by members of his family. They use light horses, as they walk so much faster. As a rule they thresh and market their wheat as soon as possible. It is now worth about 80 cents a bushel (26s. a quarter), delivered to the nearest elevator. He said also, hardly anything but wheat is grown about here, as it is too cold for Indian corn. The land costs but little; they have no tithes, and very little to pay for taxes, and they can just do at present prices, although it is not good work. I suppose, therefore, this is what the English farmers have to contend with. I will get cost of railway and ship freight to an English port if I can.

St. Paul is a fine city, well situated, with high land on each bank of the river, but enough flat along the shore to leave room for business property. The country round is well cultivated; in fact, almost as well as one of the home counties of England. It is not a great manufacturing town, but I suppose has a large trading business as the centre of a fine agricultural district. The buildings are very large in some cases, and the foundations have to be piled, as it is on a sand. The bridges over the Mississippi are high up and useful, but not beautiful. The roads are paved in most cases with round wood blocks. This hotel, the Ryan, is built by a man who made a very large fortune in California in mining, and is now spending it in blocks of buildings in this city. He must be a man of considerable judgment and very rich, as it is splendidly built and very well managed by himself. The portion he has built cost £150,000, and the size is now being doubled.

There are some fine residences and roads on the high ground, some of the roads paved with asphalt; and electric light everywhere.

This is Decoration or Commemoration Day, set apart for decorating the graves of those who fell in the slave war. There was a funny kind of 'procession, each member dressing and

marching as he thought best, and then some carriages filled with girls dressed as soldiers. They all went to the Town Hall, before which there was a platform erected, and a mixed entertainment given: prayers, speeches, music, recitations and singing, one recitation by a lady.

Just as the most important part was coming off, the floor of the platform gave way, and about one-third of those on it fell through, but as they only had about six feet to fall no one was much hurt. This incident, combined with a heavy shower of rain, rather spoiled the effect of the meeting.

The old farmer told me they had a machine to press the straw into compact bundles, so that they could send it by rail to the towns where much of it is used for paper-making and other purposes. It costs not quite 2 dollars, or 8 shillings, a ton to do it at the high price for labour they pay here.

31st. — Went to Minneapolis this morning. It is a very well built, fine city, and increasing very fast. There were 30,000 immigrants to it last year. The buildings are almost all stone and brick, and the streets well paved. The chief source of wealth is the power given by the river Mississippi here, as there are falls of 50 feet and an immense volume of water. The falls have been lined over with wood to keep the rock from wearing away, as it is soft; and the water is led, part of it at least, into channels by the side, and turbine-wheels fixed, producing an enormous power altogether, but still not half of it is utilised. The Knights of Labour have just begun to build a trade hall at Minneapolis. There is great fear here that they will run up labour too high, and injure the trade of the country. Labour is at present very unmanageable, but a good feature in it is, that when men do work they work well, and do not skulk, as some of our English mechanics do. We went over one large flour-mill, Pillsbury's. It is a sample of what enterprise will do. The power is derived from two turbine wheels, 54 inches diameter and 4 feet deep, with a head of water of 50 feet. This they say gives an effective power of 2,400 horses. There are 240 pairs of rollers in it on one floor; the rollers were made in Buffalo. The wheat is run through seven times, or rather through seven pairs of rollers, and the flour finished by ordinary stones. The whole concern works like a piece of clockwork, and turns out

7,000 barrels of flour in twenty-four hours. They have other mills, making their output altogether 10,500 barrels daily, or sufficient to feed two cities the size of New York. They have two immense elevators in Minneapolis for storing wheat, and have small ones at almost all the railway stations in the surrounding wheat districts, all in communication with the chief office by wire, so that supplies of wheat can be got along as required. They have a railway into the mills, and use two hundred trucks a day to take wheat into, and the productions of it out of, the mills. They have a fine system of precautions against fire: sprinklers which come into play at temperatures below fire heat, and tell-tales which give indication at a less high temperature. The water-power used in these mills as well as the mills belong to the Pillsburys, on whom I called, and found to be very nice people. Their agents in London are Messrs. W. Kline and Son, of Tower Street.

The one drawback is that for three months in the winter the sources of the river are frozen, and they are therefore obliged to have a stand-by in the shape of steam engines, which they use during that time. Everything that could be done to save labour was done; the casks were delivered at a spot where they rolled themselves into position and counted themselves. The sacks were put into a spout with a slope to it and then a slight rise, so that they sprung themselves into the conveyances used to remove them. No wonder our millers have a hard time of it with such competition, and I am afraid it looks like lasting. Of course this mill is only one of a number, but I suppose the largest. The best hotel in Minneapolis is large, new, and built of brick and stone. The buildings and shops are altogether excellent. We return to St. Paul in time for dinner, and leave tonight at 8.40 for Chicago.



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