

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE LETTERS OF SHERMAN HALL, MISSIONARY TO THE CHIPPEWA INDIANS

In 1831 the family of Sherman Hall, residents of Weathersfield, a secluded Vermont hamlet, bade him farewell as he set out with the purpose of converting the Chippewa Indians about Lake Superior. No doubt they felt that he had gone almost to the ends of the earth and that correspondence from that mysterious region was unique, for they cherished and carefully preserved his letters as they came back slowly from Mackinac, Sault Ste. Marie, and, finally La Pointe, the terminus of his journey.

It is fortunate for certain chapters of Minnesota and Wisconsin history that Hall's family treasured his letters in this way, for they afford the best account now known of the mission station at La Pointe. The file is now in the possession of a member of the family, Mr. Ernest W. Butterfield of Concord, New Hampshire, who in 1923 thoughtfully informed the Minnesota Historical Society of their existence. Photostatic copies of most of the documents in the file were made by the Massachusetts Historical Society; a few letters were found later and typed copies were forwarded by Mr. Butterfield. Typed copies of all the photostats have been made recently in preparation for publication in a volume of source material on the history of the Minnesota missions, and thus the information which the letters afford is now easily obtainable.

The letters number approximately eighty and cover the period from 1831 to 1875. Most of them were written from La Pointe, where Hall conducted the mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions from 1831 till 1853. In March of the latter year he removed his family to the

Crow Wing Indian agency, where he purposed to establish a new mission and to conduct a manual training school. He remained there about a year, until the American Board decided that it was useless to make further efforts to convert the Indians, since government agents were unwilling to cooperate. He then found himself without an occupation, but having purchased land in Sauk Rapids a few years before this failure of his mission plans, he withdrew to his farm and continued to reside there until his death in 1879. During this last period of his life he was pastor for many years of a little Congregational church which was supported in part by the American Home Missionary Society. Members of this church eventually decided that they no longer cared for his preaching, and so, in 1865, when he was a man advanced in years, he resigned. A letter written to his sister on April 16, 1866, tells in his own words, though partially through the very lack of words, what this episode meant to a man who had given his life to his church :

I have preached only occasionally since last July. Some of the people seemed to be dissatisfied about something ; I do not know exactly what ; and those interested to have me continue to preach became discouraged and did not make much effort to raise a salary for me. As my salary stopped, if I preached at all, I must do it gratuitously ; But as no one asked my [*sic*] to continue my services and I heard that remarks were made by some which seemed to imply that my services were not acceptable to some, I concluded that I was intruding myself upon the community to continue them. I therefore gave notice that I should discontinue my service and did so.

Hall's troubles did not end with this personal tragedy, however, for in 1874 his house burned and he lost not only all his furniture, but his entire library. In short, it is painful to read the letters written during this period, when he was trying to be hopeful and resigned though it is obvious that he was tasting the gall of failure and blighted ambition. His experiences no doubt account for the reaction to his frontier home that is expressed in the following letter of November 7, 1869 :

Now if I had those old everlasting hill[s] and mountains to write about, the first object that I ever set my eyes on and the last to be forgotten, and could talk of the old friends of youth and the changes time has made among them, I should find themes enough to inspire a letter at any time. But of this monotonous country of which you know nothing, and of its heterogeneous society and uncouth customs which would appear to you next to barbarism, I know not what to say to interest you.

The letters from La Pointe are of historical value because of the information they give about the Indians, the traders, missionary devices and plans, Indian treaties, and the immigration of the whites. Letters and diaries of other missionaries relate to the La Pointe station, but Hall's letters give the only continuous account of it.

In the letters of the later period of Hall's life, which was spent in the territory and the young state of Minnesota, the student of history can find much to interest him. First there is a brief account of the Crow Wing mission. Then follows the record of more than twenty years spent in a frontier community. For the agricultural history of the territory and state, these letters hold some information; nearly every letter for a considerable period quotes prices for farm products. The panic of 1857 was keenly felt in Sauk Rapids, and not a little attention is given by Hall to the depression that followed. Next come the echoes of the Civil War, which, apparently, did not seriously affect Sauk Rapids. The Sioux Outbreak, however, is accorded one entire letter, and on the supposed concert of Hole-in-the-Day with the Sioux it contains some valuable remarks by one whose knowledge of the Chippewa could hardly be questioned.

Besides this file of letters from Hall to his family the Minnesota Historical Society has copies of one journal and of many of Hall's letters and reports to the American Board. The originals of the journal and the second group of papers form part of the archives of that board in the library of the Congregational House in Boston. Reference has been made in an earlier number of MINNESOTA HISTORY to the discovery

of these and other letters. (See *ante*, 6:202.) In a later issue some further account of Hall's letters in these archives will be given when the entire group of northwest mission letters is described.

G. L. N.

THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE: A REPLY
TO CRITICISM

In the December, 1925, issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY, p. 370-374, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen reviews some alleged errors in an earlier article by me. His comments call for a few words of explanation.

Dr. Blegen is quite right when he condemns the statement cited from my article that "the first white settlers came to Douglas County in 1865." The error is due to a misprint. In 1919, when my article was written, some people believed that even if the Kensington stone was *in situ* at least forty or fifty years before it was found in 1898 (as appears from the official report of the Museum Committee of the Minnesota Historical Society), it might have been left there by some early Norwegian settler. I therefore investigated the time of the coming of the Norwegians to Douglas County and found that the first Norwegian settler came there in 1865. This is what I wrote in my Ms. The stenographer or typesetter through some subconscious association of ideas changed the word *Norwegian* to *white* and the change unfortunately escaped my attention in proof reading.

Dr. Blegen cavils at my statement that the late Senator Knute Nelson was one of the "first settlers" at Alexandria. He took a homestead there in 1870. If our homesteaders are not to be counted among the first settlers, who are? The fact that there were many trappers, speculators, and soldiers of fortune there before him as well as other early homesteaders does not detract from his honor of being one of the bona fide "first settlers." He is so regarded by all the early settlers around there. Moreover, as nothing hinges on the statement,



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