

## MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

### A PENNSYLVANIAN VISITS THE WEST IN 1855<sup>1</sup>

In the fifties a general interest in impressions of the West was prevalent in the eastern part of the United States and letters from venturesome friends or relatives who traveled westward claimed much attention. One can sense without difficulty the eagerness with which the following letter was read by the Pennsylvania friends of the writer; and a vivid picture of a frontier town it must have left on the minds of all who heard it. Nothing further is known of the writer. The letter was found with some letters addressed to Samuel W. Sharp in the papers of Curtis H. Pettit, a pioneer resident of Minneapolis.<sup>2</sup> Presumably this Sharp was the man of that name mentioned in the letter.

WILLIAM K. MCFARLANE TO IRVINE, STOUGH, *et al.*, May 25, 1855  
[Pettit Papers — A. L. S.]

FALLS OF ST ANTHONY May 25<sup>th</sup> 1855  
MESS<sup>s</sup> IRVINE, STOUGH, BRICKER, SHARP, M<sup>c</sup>KENNEY,  
DILLER, DUNLAP, WOODBURY, & C  
ESTEEMED FRIENDS

(Sketches of Minnasota by an Emigrant)

On a beautiful Sabbath morning we rounded the bend immediately below St Paul and the city burst upon our view the white steeples of the churches towering aloft far above the surrounding Houses adds greatly to the appearance of the place after firing our swivel as steamboats Generally do we rounded to and went ashore I have been in some *few towns* in my journey through life but a more motley Crowd than stood on the landing at St Paul I

<sup>1</sup> This document, together with the introductory note, has been supplied by Dr. Grace Lee Nute, curator of manuscripts for the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

<sup>2</sup> See *post*, p. 360.

have never saw in any town of its size Irishmen, Dutch, Californians, nigers omnibus drivers, Boatmen, speculators Dandys, Gamblers Winnabages & Soux Indians half Breed, Frenchmen, & Hosts of others too numerous to minten as we passed up to the American house (by the way kept about the same as the Franklin in Phi[ladelphi]a) the Bells were ringing for divine servic and the streets were thronged with as well dressed people as You would see in any of our large towns the fact is there are numbers here from New York when we landed at the American I saw one specimen of this Class Genus homo who was looking at the scenery through a large opera Glass and remarked to a bystander that it was *demed Foine* but wild.

Took a wash and went with some acquaint[anc]e[s] to Episcopal Church on our way passed the first Church (A Catholic one) erected in St Paul. 7 years ago St Paul was a little Hamlet without any present prospect of being any more in future than an ordinary Country town her buisness was then considered large at \$131,000 now the buisness for last year may be summed up at \$6,000,000 Four Daily & Weekly papers are published here and have a large Circulation when standing on the Bluffs back of Town I could not help contrasting the present condition with what it was 10 years ago then the camping ground of Indians now covered with Handsome residences that would do credit to Phia Gov Ramsey has a handsome one and can live retired as he has made his pile front lots are held at \$100 pr foot in the principal street prices that I think cannot be sustained at least I have found places of more Healthy grothe where a person can invest money to a better advantage

After looking around and becomeing somewhat acquainted in St Paul I left for St Anthony one of the most romantick places on the Missippi nature has done for this place what she has not done for many others viz the river here falls over the rocks some 20 ft and on both sides for 1½ miles leaves a butiful plain for building a city the Lumber trade of St Anthony alone was \$1,000,000 last year, and it is yet in its infancy but suffice it to say that after traveling over a considerable portion of Minnasota I came back & purchased a Property within ⅓ of Mile of Coperate limits of the City and if any of you ever visit the Falls of St

Anthony your Friend Mc will be on hands to Welcome you I was offered in the evening \$500 for my bargain but dec[1]ined to take it I would just mention to my Friends Irvine & Stough that the[y] brew splendid Ale one mile from my place and I occasi[o]naly indulge I shall give you a description of the town at some future time

A word to persons intending to settle here now I do not pretend to advise any one about Coming west but would say to those intending to settle in Minnasota that from actual observation I would Cons[i]der that the best portion of the Teritory lay south of the Mississippi along the St Peters and bordering on sothron Iowa there is as handsome land as ever the sun shone upon south of the St Peters and I intend to enter some before going home a great part of that County is settled by Pennsylvanians the Northeren part of the Country is more sandy and abounds in small Lakes I have some property on a lake that is filled with splendid fish the Country through the Lakes generally is what is called oak openings and soil a dark sandy Loam I love Minnasota for its clear springs of water better is not to be had on the banks of Big spring. 4 Miles from St Anthony Lays 3 Lakes Called Crystal Lake, Lake Harriet & Lake of the Woods if there is any thing more butiful than to stand on the shores of any of these Lakes and watch the setting sun the waves running on the pebly shore with a faint murm[ur] which almost lulls a person to sleep —

The glorious heaven the Lake so blue, the forests dark and still, your friend has not seen it. by next year their banks will be studded with Farms already unimproved Land near there is held at \$10 pr A[cre] which in 6 mo. will prob. bring \$15 Gentlemen you can form no Conception of the way property advances This country as minnasota is but 5 years old in Two more she will be knocking at the door for admission into the union I have become acquainted with the Most prominent men about St Anthony and feel almost as much at home as if setting in Fri[e]nd Danls all that is wanting is to hear the Hearty laugh of Bricker and the pleasant smile of my Friend the Dr & Stough I have an excelent Boarding place and while I am writing this to you the Lady of the House (she is a splendid looking woman) is teasing

me for writing to my *sweet Heart* in Penn<sup>a</sup> I of course take it all in good earnest for the sake of Conversation as I calculate to be pretty tolerably well acquainted about these diggings before I go east. She says one day Mr Mc you ought to have brought a wife with You you *surely must* feel the want of one Says I indeed Mrs Nourse I do feel the *want* and feel it *sensibly*.

To give You an entire account of My trip would fill some 5 sheets of Fools cap, and perhaps would create a smile on the most stoical Countenance Suffice it to say that I have travell'd into the indian County within 200 miles of Lake Itasca the head of the Mississippi have slept in the midst of an encampment of 1200 Winnabagoes have crossed the Mississippi on a Dug out and floted on it[s] Clar water at Sauk Rapids 100 miles above St Anthony I have seen life in ways that I never did before Came across one man in the indian County who keeps a Tavern and is married to an Indian squaw he had two bouncing half Breed daughters good looking but dirty as the ——I they received us kindly but as I saw them cooking the meal I had no appetite for it though Hungry in my next I shall give something more about the diferent soils &c my thanks to Friend Stough & Bricker for favors received

Truly Yours

W<sup>m</sup> K McFARLANE



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