

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

AN EARLY MINNESOTA MILL

The past seventy years have witnessed as great a change in the processes of flour milling in Minnesota as in the aspect of the countryside. In 1857 one of the best-known flour mills of the territory was located on the site of the great modern plant of the King Midas Mill in Hastings. A pencil drawing of the falls of the Vermillion River made by Augustus O. Moore in 1863 shows a small wooden mill at the head of a low dam.¹ The water issuing from the dam falls immediately over strata of rock worn down evidently from a striated cliff on the right. The delicate tracery of the bushes and trees, both on the low left bank and among the crevices in the cliff, catch the eye as evidence not merely of the artist's skill but also of the beauty of this rural scene.

And the mill itself was known by the colorful name of the stream. Two Vermillion mills are mentioned — the upper and the lower — in the quaint books of the concern in the manuscript division of the Minnesota Historical Society. The earlier of these two volumes is entitled "Memorandum Book With the Hands." The opening entry reads: "Vermillion Mills Dec 12th 1857 Owen McKune has to day hauled 6 cords wood." This is a typical entry. In fact, it becomes obvious from reading the little book that not all the "hands" could be kept busy all the time with grinding and hauling the wheat, corn, rye and other cereals that the neighboring farmers brought in. And so Owen McKune hauled wood, Pierre Le Beuf worked "about the house," Pat King killed hogs, Goody Myers helped in "assorting the potatoes," Adolph

¹ This drawing is in the Moore collection, which was exhibited recently in the museum of the Minnesota Historical Society. See *ante*, p. 59. *Ed.*

Mathew grubbed in the garden, and at one time they all united in "*metamorphosing* the young pigs."

What they earned at this varied kind of employment is revealed in the other volume, which is entitled, "Day-Book, Vermillion Mills Oct 13th 1859." The entry for October 31 reads in part: "Adolph Mathews Cr By one months labor at Lower Mill during the month of Oct at 25 pr mon 25.00." Duncan Cadwell received thirty-five dollars for "one months labor at Upper mill as miller"; and Emma Faist, the cook — evidently for the "hands" — received the munificent salary of five dollars per month. But profits were in accordance with this low wage scale. The following is evidently the record of receipts from grinding for one month:

| Vermillion Mill | | | |
|------------------------|-------|---------|-------|
| By grist recpts as fls | | | |
| Wheat | ..... | 42.3 bu | 40.80 |
| Corn | ..... | 42.00 | 14.70 |
| Rye | ..... | 4.8 | 2.20 |
| Corn Ear | ..... | 3.0 | 90 |
| Corn & oats | ..... | 7.8 | 2.34 |
| Penny Grass | ..... | 1.3 | 52 |
| Oats | ..... | 2.3 | 69 |
| Buck Wheat | ..... | 2.6 | 1.10 |
| Pigion Grass | ..... | 2. | 60 |
| Barley | ..... | 0.5 | 20 |
| | | | 64.05 |

Of course there were other receipts than those from grinding, and many of these are given day by day in this volume. One also learns from these entries that the fame of the Vermillion Mills was spread abroad in Minnesota, for on December 19, 1857, "Owen & Pierre [were] Sent to St Paul with two loads Flour. 36 S^{cks}." From this hazardous trip through the wilderness "Both returned all right" as the very next entry records. Later flour was sent to far-away St. Cloud. The day came when these mills shipped flour to England.

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