

THE INFORMATION BUREAU

FLOODS ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

The Lake States Forest Experiment Station is making an investigation for the United States government of forest conditions on the upper sources of the Mississippi River in relation to the recent floods. Do you have any material which would indicate the prevalence of floods on the Mississippi in early times and whether flood conditions existed on the upper tributaries of that river in the Lake states in the past?

RAPHAEL ZON, director, St. Paul.

A good general survey of floods on the Mississippi River appears in E. W. Gould's *Fifty Years on the Mississippi*, 245-268 (St. Louis, 1889). This author describes briefly some of the early floods that explorers tell about, and in more recent times he reports on severe floods in 1844, 1854, 1858, 1867, 1871, 1874, 1881, and 1882. An examination of Minnesota newspapers for the years after 1849 would reveal to what extent these floods damaged the region of the upper river.

An example of an early flood on the upper Mississippi is given by Father Guignas, who tells how the inhabitants of Fort Beauharnois on Lake Pepin were driven from their cabins in the spring of 1728 (see *ante*, 6: 367).

Major Samuel Woods and Captain John Pope, who traveled from Fort Snelling northwestward to the Red River in 1849, describe the flooded Minnesota prairies of that year in their reports published in 31 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 42, and *House Executive Documents*, no. 51 (serials 558 and 577).

There is good material on the Minnesota River flood of 1862 in George B. Merrick's *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi* (Cleveland, 1909). In this year "there was a nineteen-foot rise in the river," and the stream "did not follow the regular channel, but cut right across bends and points, so that most of

the time the current was setting squarely across the river." Hiram M. Chittenden's *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River* (New York, 1903) has some references to the effect of the Missouri on high water at St. Louis.

The value of newspaper material was tested by taking the *Daily Pioneer Press* of St. Paul and Minneapolis for the spring months of 1881 as a sample. Practically every issue from the middle of April to the middle of May was found to contain valuable material. About April 13 reports of serious flood conditions along the Missouri and its tributaries in the Dakotas began to appear. From day to day the flood moved eastward; the situation in Iowa became serious; and then towns in the Minnesota River Valley reported dangerously high water. On April 25 the *Pioneer Press* announced in its headlines that the flood was "Getting too Near Home" and that the "center of interest in the flood situation [was] suddenly transferred to our own state." How suddenly the waters came is indicated by tables giving the "record of the rise" at St. Paul, published from day to day in the *Pioneer Press*. From a depth of five feet six inches on April 16 the Mississippi rose to nineteen feet six and a half inches on April 30. The waters then began to recede, and by 2:00 A.M. of the following day they had dropped six inches. During all this time the Mississippi north of St. Paul was not unusually high, and as the waters rose at St. Paul they receded along the Minnesota. Again, as conditions at St. Paul improved, they grew worse farther and farther south along the Mississippi, according to the daily newspaper reports.

An article based upon interviews with pioneers apropos of earlier floods at St. Paul appears in the *Pioneer Press* of April 27, 1881. The writer reports that the old settlers consulted were not certain about the dates of earlier floods and that no official records of the stages of water during these floods had been kept. A. L. Larpenteur told the reporter that in 1852 the first floor of his warehouse on the levee at Jackson Street was under water and that a steamboat ran up "against the second

story window in the rear of the warehouse through which her freight was discharged." Charles F. Miller recalled that in 1858 "steamboats which intended to go up to Mendota could not pass the river bridge on account of the high water, their smoke-stacks and jack-staffs being above the floor of the bridge." The writer records that "In conversations with old settlers mention was made of extreme high water in 1851, 1852, 1858, 1859, 1861, 1862, 1867 and 1870, and recollections were given of the flat in West St. Paul having been flooded several times so completely that the residents had to leave."

B. L. H.

THE ICELANDIC AND BELGIAN SETTLEMENTS IN LYON COUNTY

I am preparing a paper for the department of geography on the Icelandic and Belgian settlements in the vicinity of Minneota and Ghent. What materials do you have concerning these people or the Minneota-Ghent section of Lyon County?

L. E. S., Moorhead State Teachers College

A good account of the "Catholic Colony of Ghent" appears in C. F. Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 51-54 (Marshall, 1884). The Belgian colony also receives considerable attention in Arthur P. Rose, *Illustrated History of Lyon County*, 211-215 (Marshall, 1912). Of special interest is the material on the Catholic church organized in this colony in 1883. The names of all the original members are given, and this list probably includes the entire Belgian population at the time. As you probably know, this colony was one of Archbishop Ireland's projects.

The Icelandic settlement at Minneota is described in an article entitled "Icelandic Communities in America: Cultural Backgrounds and Early Settlements," by Thorstina Jackson, in the *Journal of Social Forces*, 3: 684 (May, 1925). According to this author the first Icelander, Gunnlaugur Petursson, settled near Minneota in July, 1875. "At present," she writes, "there



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