

MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

UP THE MINNESOTA VALLEY TO FORT RIDGELY IN 1853

The treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in the summer of 1851 greatly simplified the problem of providing homes for the thousands of immigrants who were flocking to Minnesota Territory. Prior to that date legal settlement had been confined to the region east of the Mississippi below the mouth of the Crow Wing River, but as James M. Goodhue, the editor of the *Minnesota Pioneer*, wrote in the issue for August 16, 1849, "These Sioux lands [*west of the Mississippi*] are the admiration of every body, and the mouth of many a stranger and citizen waters while he looks beyond the Mississippi's flood upon the fair Canaan beyond." Small wonder, then, that Governor Alexander Ramsey worked for a treaty that would open these lands to white settlement.

There was much opposition to the treaties in the Senate during the spring of 1852, and they were not ratified until June 23 of that year. Henry H. Sibley, the territorial delegate in Congress, wrote to Ramsey that "never did any measures have a tighter squeeze through."¹ Even after they were ratified, the eager settlers legally should have waited until the Indians could be removed and surveys made by the general land office. The land speculator and the settler, however, were not to be balked by such minor details as the presence of Indians and the lack of surveys. They went into the region before it was legally open to settlement and some even planted crops. These "sooners" relied upon public sentiment, crystallizing into claim associations, to protect their interests, and they asserted

¹ Sibley to Ramsey, June 26, 1852, Ramsey Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 266-304 (St. Paul, 1921).

their rights through newspaper announcements such as the following, which ran in the *Weekly Minnesotian* of St. Paul for more than two months from May 14, 1853:

IN FEBRUARY, 1852, Henry M'Lean and myself came to Le Sueur for the purpose of engaging in the Indian Trade. A Land Claim was made by us conjointly for that purpose. The trading was abandoned, and he (M'Lean) left — never made any improvements, nor expended any money thereon, nor has he ever had possession of said property.

On the other hand, I have resided on the claim at Le Sueur; held possession of the property both before and since the ratification of the treaty; have expended my means in improvements, and consider that according to all rules of Claim Associations, my right is singly and indisputably good, which I shall maintain to the last, as well in resisting encroachments, as defending my rights.

May 14

J. E. CHRISTY, Le Sueur.

Not till July 23, 1853, did the *Minnesotian* announce that the general land office had issued orders for the survey of the ceded Sioux lands. Plats for the town sites of Le Sueur and Traverse des Sioux were on view in St. Paul, however, by October 1, 1852.²

Once the Minnesota Valley was thrown open to settlement, it became obvious that troops stationed at Fort Snelling would be a long distance from the seat of any possible trouble with the Sioux, who, by the terms of the treaties of 1851, would be removed to reservations extending along the Minnesota from the mouth of Little Rock Creek to Lake Traverse. Consequently on July 12, 1852, Sibley wrote to General Winfield Scott recommending the establishment of a military post on the Minnesota near the proposed reservations. Water transportation would be available, and timber was abundant in the upper country. Sibley's letter bore the indorsement of several Iowa and Wisconsin Congressmen. His suggestion met with

² *Minnesotian*, June 12, August 7, September 18, October 2, 1852; July, 23, 1853; 33 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 221 (serial 690).

favor, and a board of officers consisting of Colonel Francis Lee of the Sixth United States Infantry and Captain Napoleon J. T. Dana of the quartermaster corps was appointed to select an eligible location. Its report, dated December 7, 1852, was approved by the commanding general. Companies C and K from Fort Snelling and Company E from Fort Dodge, all of the Sixth United States Infantry, were selected to build and garrison the new post. Captain Dana was named quartermaster and was given the responsibility for transporting and provisioning the troops. The Fort Snelling companies were instructed to get to the new site as early as possible in the spring of 1853.³

During the period of high water in the early spring vessels of fair size, which normally plied the Mississippi, could operate on the Minnesota River. Such boats were used in transporting troops and supplies to the site of the proposed fort, for their large cargo capacities greatly simplified that proceeding. A special trip of this kind afforded an unusual opportunity for observing the new country, as well as for gathering material that could be used in the columns of the newspapers. Consequently the St. Paul newspapers had their correspondents on the first boats to go to the new fort site.

The publishers of the *Minnesota Democrat*, though alert to the importance of the Minnesota Valley,⁴ do not seem to have been particularly interested in the fort project, which had been fostered by Sibley, one of their political abominations. This paper did not mention the movement of troops up the valley

³ The information about the founding of the fort is taken from an anonymous manuscript history of "Fort Ridgely, Minnesota," in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The account was compiled in Washington from the archives of the war department and was sent to the society in 1880 by order of Ramsey, who was then secretary of war. A map showing the Sioux reservations is in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 324.

⁴ The *Democrat* did have a correspondent, Dr. T. T. Mann, on board the "Clarion," which left St. Paul on April 22, 1853, and his letters appear in the issues of that paper for April 27, May 4, 11, and 18, 1853.

in April, 1853, and it barely referred to the new fort as the point to which cargoes on the "West Newton," the "Clarion," and the "Tiger" were consigned. In the columns of the *Minnesotian* for 1852 and 1853 many items and articles about Minnesota Valley development were published, and an extended account of the trip to establish the new fort appears in the issue for May 7, 1853, spread over four of the seven columns on its principal news page. In addition, a fifth column is devoted to a letter from a correspondent at Traverse des Sioux. These two narratives are here reprinted because of the detailed information they give about conditions along the Minnesota River in the spring of 1853.

From internal evidence in the account of the expedition, there can be little doubt that its author was John P. Owens, the editor of the *Minnesotian*. That the writer was a journalist is evident not only from the character of the writing, but also from a reference to Moses Y. Beach, the owner of the *New York Sun*, as a "gentleman of our profession, ready to impart at all times his experience and advice to his younger brothers of the quill." The Traverse des Sioux correspondent — whose own identity has not been determined — mentions the fact that Owens "loomed up on the hurricane deck" as the "West Newton" swung into the landing at Traverse des Sioux, and it is therefore known that he was a member of the party aboard that boat. Finally, the article appears in the regular editorial space of Owens' newspaper.

WILLOUGHBY M. BABCOCK

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

[*Minnesotian* (St. Paul), May 7, 1853]

A TRIP TO THE NEW FORT

THE OCCASION

The exigencies of the public service have, the past week, accomplished that which private enterprize has heretofore fallen

some fifty or a hundred miles short of. For the past three years, the people hereabout have greatly desired the penetration by steamboat of that heretofore *terra incognita*, the portion of the Minnesota Valley above the point attained by the Yankee during the summer of 1850. The region being unknown to boatmen, and the risk of running up so high amid the serpentine windings and labyrinthine dells and entanglements of heavy timber and undergrowth being considered very great, it was scarcely possible to expect the accomplishment of such an undertaking at private expense, particularly as individuals have as yet no business thitherward that would justify so great an outlay.⁵ But the preparations of the government for removing the Sioux Indians to their new home, and the attendant arrangements for military defence of the adjacent frontier, have mingled profit with convenience in exploring these wilds.

The steamer West Newton, Capt. D[aniel] S. Harris, of the Galena and Minnesota Packet Line, a boat about 150 feet in length, and three hundred tons burthen, was selected by Capt. Dana, of the Quartermaster's department, to make this pioneer voyage.⁶ The Newton was well adapted to the task. Of great strength and power, and in the hands of skillful men, it was felt that if there were dangers and difficulties in the way of reaching the destined point, she would be better able to brave them than any other craft known in these waters. She left St. Paul on Tuesday afternoon of last week [April 26], and was detained during the evening and night at Fort Snelling, taking on board the two companies of Infantry, which are to form part of the garrison at the new post, and their effects. Soldiers and soldiers' baggage — soldiers' wives and soldiers' children — soldiers' stores and soldiers' equipments — soldiers' cattle and soldiers' dogs are

⁵ Four excursions up the Minnesota River were made during the summer of 1850 by Mississippi River packets, one of which went about three hundred miles upstream. William J. Petersen, "The Early History of Steamboating on the Minnesota River," *ante*, p. 126.

⁶ The "West Newton" made its appearance in the upper Mississippi trade in the summer of 1852, announcing a semi-weekly schedule between St. Paul and Galena. Captain Russell Blakeley, "History of the Discovery of the Mississippi River and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 389.

huddled together, and strewn about the boat from engine room to 'Texas.' We awake Wednesday morning, and find the Newton with a heavily laden barge in tow, plowing the placid 'sky-colored water' near Good-Road's village.⁷ The river is high—some thirty or forty feet above low water mark. The bottom lands of the Minnesota Valley are all under water, many places of sufficient depth to navigate a steamboat twice the size of ours. The morning air comes bracing from the hills, and the company of the cabin are out upon the guards and the hurricane deck enjoying it.

THOSE ABOARD

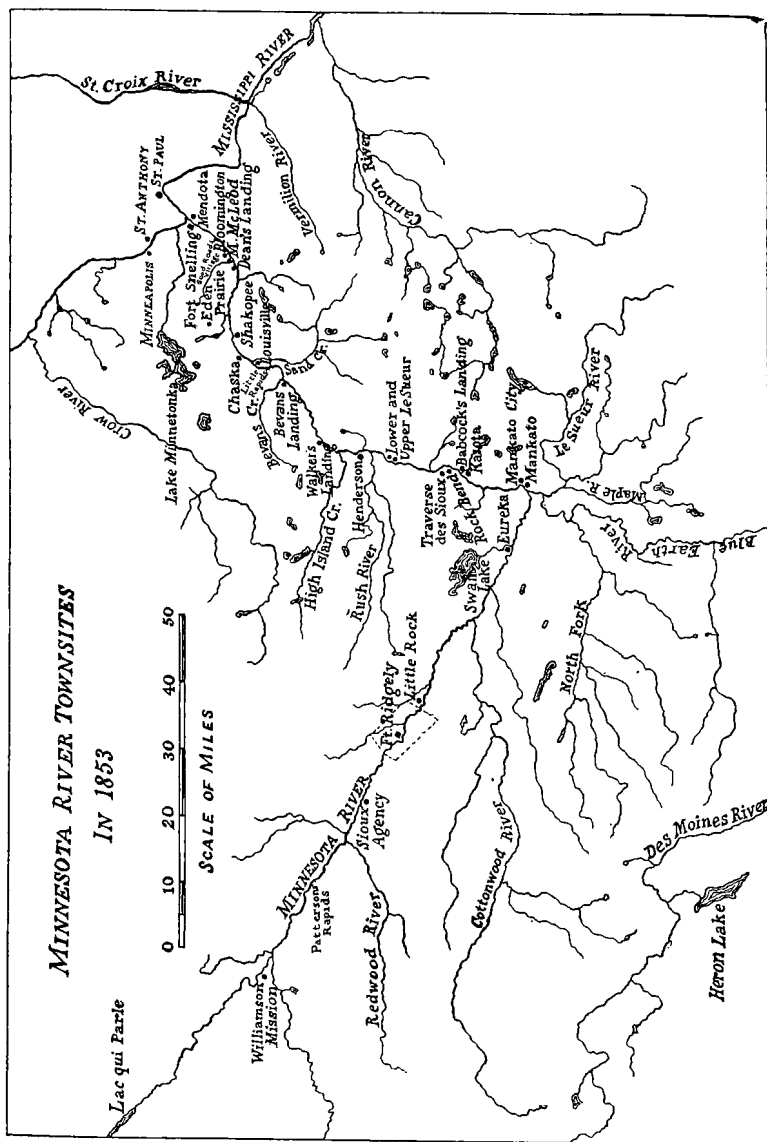
Our number is small, and those composing it of the most agreeable and intelligent character, which fact promises that we are to have a pleasant time of it. With us journeys the veteran pioneer of the American penny newspaper press, Moses Y. Beach, Esq., and his agreeable lady, accompanied by their traveling companion, Miss Hobbs, an English lady of education and brilliant accomplishments, and withal one apparently specially sent to enliven and add to the charms of a journey into the wilderness, such as this. We regret to find Mr. Beach an invalid after the laborious years he has passed in an active and exacting business. But having amassed a competency by patient toil, he is disposed to enjoy it rationally and properly. We have never met a more affable and agreeable gentleman of our profession, ready to impart at all times his experience and advice to his younger brothers of the quill.⁸ Then we have the lady of Capt. Harris, a proficient in and enthusiastic admirer of the natural sciences, which promises to be of advantage to us in our researches among the soils, rocks and plants of the Upper Minnesota. She has as her guest a well known St. Paul lady, whose enthusiasm for pioneering, and being

⁷ Good Road's village was near the mouth of Nine Mile Creek on the north bank of the Minnesota. On a map drawn in 1835 it is located seven miles from Fort Snelling by water. Samuel W. Pond, "The Dakotas or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12: 327; Lawrence Taliaferro, map of the "Site of the Agency at St. Peters," tube 129, map 540, Indian Office, Washington. The Minnesota Historical Society has a photostatic copy of this map.

⁸ Beach was the owner of the *New York Sun*; he was connected with that paper from 1835 to 1857.

MINNESOTA RIVER TOWNSITES

IN 1853



the first white woman to set foot upon this and that remote, out-of-the way place is proverbial.⁹ Capt. Dana, to whose energy and determination we are indebted for having so commodious a boat for the trip, with Capt. [James] Monroe and Lieut. [John C.] Kelton of the Sixth Infantry, and Hon. B[enjamin] H. Randall, who is to be the Sutler at the new post, together with six or eight other gentlemen, some of whom are strangers, complete the list. A very excellent and desirable company, neither too large nor too small.

ADVANCE OF IMPROVEMENT

We had not ascended the Minnesota since the title to these broad acres passed from savage to civilized hands. The mark of the pioneer settler is everywhere apparent along the shores. Here in Hennepin County is the settlement known as Bloomington, a clean, tidy looking place, with farms opening all around. Presently we are up to Shakope, quite a town already, with busy life and activity thronging the landing. Quite a difference this, since the summer of 1850, when we used to land in front of the Indian village just below, and all the boats were compelled to pay tribute to the old beggar chief for whom the town is named, who rigidly enforced his custom house regulations, backed by his young men as tide waiters and executors of the requirements of a revenue police generally. Many of our old St. Paul neighbors have pitched their tents here. The original proprietor, our old friend Holmes, has gathered about him the proper elements to make his town go ahead and himself a rich man.¹⁰ Here is Robert Kennedy, Esq., with his family, keeping the new and elegant hotel, a house nearly or quite as large as the Central, in St. Paul. Back from the river

⁹ This was Miss Harriet Bishop, whose account of the trip, including selections from the present narrative, appears in her *Floral Home*, 288-300 (New York, 1857).

¹⁰ Shakopee was named for the Sioux chief whose village was located on the site. It was also known as Holmes's Landing in honor of the town-site proprietor, Thomas A. Holmes, who located there in 1851. Alfred T. Andreas, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*, 232 (Chicago, 1874).

upon most excellent farming claims are located Nobles, and Barnes, and others of St. Paul's old citizens.¹¹ — As we approach the 'Little Rapids' we are informed by a sign-board upon a post that the place now opposite us is 'Louisville' — the landing of a trading post occupied by Capt. Louis Roberts.¹² No sign of any rapids. The water is perhaps thirty feet upon the slight ledge of crumbling sandstone which aforetime was so great an obstruction in the minds of some to the navigation of this river, and which in the worst view of the case can be blown to atoms with two or three kegs of powder.

We travel on, and about noon another enterprise by some of the St. Paul boys — Bevans' Landing — comes in sight. Just as we are approaching it, one of our wheels badly 'let's down,' and we are compelled to stop for repairs. Glad of it! We will have a chance to see how our friends are getting along up here in the woods. We find 'Cor.' and his brother, the younger Bevans, and two or three others of our old neighbors, hard at work, clearing and breaking ground, and not at all dressed or wearing their former appearance of townspeople. They are all glad to see us, however, and we them.¹³ We remained here five hours and a half, and had ample time for an extensive stroll over the surrounding country. Our wheel mended, we jogged on, and tied up for the night at Walker's Landing at the lower verge of the 'Big

¹¹ William H. Nobles and Comfort Barnes were two of Scott County's first officials after its organization in 1853, the former holding the offices of register of deeds and county surveyor and the latter being a county commissioner. In 1857 Nobles had charge of a government expedition which traced out a wagon road from Fort Ridgely to the Pacific. He also discovered Nobles' Pass through the Rocky Mountains. Andreas, *Atlas of Minnesota*, 232; J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul and of the County of Ramsey*, 194 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4).

¹² Robert was a prominent trader, real estate dealer, and steamboat owner of St. Paul. Williams, *Saint Paul*, 140-143.

¹³ Corydon D. Bevans advertised in the *Minnesota Pioneer* for November 22, 1849, as a dealer in stoves and a manufacturer of all kinds of tin and copper ware. He and his brother, Henry L. Bevans, were living in St. Paul in 1850. Williams, *St. Paul*, 266.

Woods.’¹⁴ Soon the next morning, we passed that noted place of great water privilege, Henderson. The inhabitants had deserted their inundated dwellings, and were abiding in tents pitched upon a wood flat. We understand our friend [Joseph R.] Brown, the proprietor of Henderson, gives it as his opinion that the inundation of the site is caused by the immense quantity of wood he has cut and piled upon the bank — the ground becoming greatly depressed by the weight thereof! We hope this theory may prove true, and that Henderson will be ‘let up’ after awhile.

We journey along finely, and are soon at Le Sueur City. This beautiful and eligible town site we have frequently alluded to during the past eighteen months, and right glad were we to approach it, now that it has donned the habiliments of civilized life and business. It is a place that must ever gladden the eye of the traveler as he passes from the thick and monotonous foliage of the ‘Big Woods’ which skirts either side of the river for miles and miles below. Le Sueur again comes out to the river’s bank after we pass a bend of bottom land of a mile or two in extent. It is only half a mile, however, across the prairie from the lower to the upper landing and eventually the extremes, like the upper and lower ends of St. Paul, will meet, forming one continuous town. Both landings exhibit the most encouraging signs of progress and business activity. Settlers are rapidly taking up good farming claims in the vicinity; all going to show that Le Sueur has a ‘sure thing’ of becoming a place of note.

At Traverse des Sioux the whole population, white and red, turned out to welcome the West Newton, and there were not a few of them when all were arrayed in line along the shore. As our Traverse correspondent writes at full length concerning this point, we will pass on with the remark that here we learned the howling Tiger, which left St. Paul the previous Saturday, was not very far ahead of us, and that on her way up she passed up over the line of the *contemplated* canal in front of Traverse, from the

¹⁴ Walker’s Landing eventually became the town of Faxon in Sibley County. Three brothers, Joseph, Cornelius, and Hartwell Walker, settled on the site in 1852, and the latter was postmaster for a time. Edward D. Neill, *History of the Minnesota Valley*, 433 (Minneapolis, 1882).

landing to Rock Bend, saving some two or three miles in distance by the operation, and demonstrating that canals are sometimes navigable before they are dug.¹⁵ We presume our boat could have taken the same track at this stage of water and come out safe. Rock Bend has just been laid out into town lots. It is a mere extension of Traverse, and a very handsome and eligible one at that, with a good landing in front.

A few miles further up, we passed Babcock's Landing, and presently the place where Kasota is to be. We understand Mr. B[abcock] has his sawmill in fine order and running, and that houses are forthwith to be built in Kasota with lumber therefrom. Our Traverse correspondent also speaks at length of this place. We understand also that some eight or ten of the Northampton colony have settled in the vicinity of Kasota, and are much pleased with the country.¹⁶ At four o'clock P. M. we reached Mankato. There are two Mankatos, as well as two Le Sueurs, lying side by side. The lower and newest one is the property of our enterprising fellow-citizen, Henry McKenty, Esq., and is already not un-

¹⁵ The proposed canal probably was to cut across the low ground in front of Traverse des Sioux, thus eliminating a large bend in the river. Another reference to it occurs *post*, p. 183. For a reference to the "Tiger," a small Minnesota River boat, see Petersen, *ante*, p. 130. Rock Bend was a town-site project on the north bank of the Minnesota; it developed into the city of St. Peter. William G. Gresham, *History of Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties*, 1: 192 (Indianapolis, 1916).

¹⁶ Joseph W. Babcock's claim, which seems to have been known as Babcock's Landing, adjoined Kasota on the north at the mouth of Chankaska Creek in Le Sueur County. Kasota was platted by Babcock and Ovid Pinney in 1855. During the winter of 1852-53 Babcock was a forwarding and commission merchant at St. Paul. The Northampton colony was a project of the Minnesota Claim Association, which was organized about 1852 at Northampton, Massachusetts. Its president and an agent arrived in St. Paul during the winter of 1852-53 to make preliminary arrangements for the members, who were to emigrate to the new region when navigation opened. The colony, however, did not materialize, for the members scattered upon arriving at St. Paul. Some twenty located in the vicinity of Lake Minnetonka in Hennepin County, others settled along the Cannon River in Rice County, and still others went to Kasota. *Minnesotian*, December 11, 1852; January 15, February 5, 26, April 9, May 7, 1853; Gresham, *Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties*, 1: 402, 403.

known to fame.¹⁷ It has all the advantages of the old Mankato, and if one advances the other must. At the original landing we found P[arsons] K. Johnson and family, and many more old St. Paulers. They say they had a very cold winter up there, and that last summer the mosquitoes killed and nearly devoured a mule.

Wooding at Mankato, we again started out, and at six o'clock passed the mouth of Blue Earth river, having been about twenty hours running time in reaching that point from Fort Snelling. The boat got on slowly, owing to the weight she carried and towed, and the time lost in making short bends. The river very preceptibly diminishes in width above the Blue Earth, and also becomes more crooked.

By stopping time at dark we were above the point reached by the Yankee. We are prepared to state as the deliberate judgment of all on board the Newton, as well as from our own observation, that the character of the country greatly improves after passing Blue Earth. The soil is better, so is the timber. One of the richest and most beautiful prairies we ever beheld, near where we laid by, was named West Newton Prairie, in honor of the first *steamboat*¹⁸ that had ever plowed the blue waters along its verdant and flower-clad margin. If we were going to make a 'claim,' we would go right up to that point. The prairie and timber lands are both of the very best quality — would pass for No. 1 in any country.

ON NEW WATERS

We were now upon a portion of the beautiful Minnesota never rippled by the machinery of Fulton, until the Tiger passed up the day previous. Soon we would overhaul and pass her, and then we would assume the pioneership. — Taking an early start, we accomplished this end before breakfast time. We found the menagerial craft jammed up in a short bend of the river, with Captain and all hands ashore chopping wood. We shot past her, and the

¹⁷ McKenty settled at St. Paul in 1851 and later developed the town site of Mankato City. The *Minnesotian* carried his advertisements with fair regularity during 1853.

¹⁸ The "West Newton" was the second boat, as the "Tiger" had already passed this point.

next turn were out of sight. She had been five days making this distance from Fort Snelling, although we have no doubt she took it easy and leisurely along, and perhaps might have done better. The Tiger is to be preferred to no navigable craft at all. The country continues to improve and the river to grow worse. The soil is richer and deeper, the trees are more plentiful and larger, and the river is more snakishly twisted about and contracted. The bluffs incline evenly and gradually up from the bank; on the north side mostly prairie, on the south heavily beset with huge sugar maples, ashes, elms, white walnuts and lindens. The view is monotonous until you reach the mouth of the Cotton-Wood, a considerable stream from the south, save a few miles below said mouth you discover on the northern shore high bluffs of red sand, underlaid with a strata of palish blue. Upon examination, there are strong indications of iron ore at this point, and some slight signs of coal. The sand of these bluffs is nearly as deep red as the Sioux pipe-stone. — They have a very beautiful and imposing appearance from the water.

COTTON-WOOD* RIVER

As we have remarked, this is a considerable tributary to the Minnesota, coming in from the south. It is next in size to the Blue Earth. — We are now at the mouth of it, ten o'clock, Friday. It disembogues through a high prairie, stretching far away on either side. A rocky prairie is also opposite on the north bank of the Minnesota, and in the river are several small islands, which render the navigation bad. The Cotton-Wood bears off to the south-west, through a most fertile and well wooded valley, and in the course of seventy-five miles approaches a point within three miles of the *Des Moines river*, which every body knows discharges itself into the Mississippi below Keokuk. It runs also at the point where it so nearly approaches the Des Moines within five miles of the Big Sioux river, which enters the Missouri at the point of our south-western Territorial boundary. The Cotton-Wood country abounds in game, and is consequently a favorite resort of the Indians. 'Sleepy-Eyes' has his village at the mouth of the stream. The valley of the Cotton-Wood will one day support

* Dakota, *Waraju*, and so laid down on the maps. [*Author's note*]

a dense white population.¹⁹ From what we can gather it is one of the gardens of the late Sioux Purchase, and will consequently settle rapidly when the tide of emigration once becomes set that way.

STILL MORE SNAKY

We are now compelled to proceed more slowly, as the river continues to become more and more serpentine in its course. We are expecting every moment to find it tied up in a double bow-knot. The bluffs are some three miles apart, with the intervening valley slightly timbered, and at this time covered with water. The course of the river is an interminable zig-zag, a continuous tacking almost at right angles with the line of bluffs — which is remarkably straight, even and uniform — from one side of the valley to the other. We are frequently compelled to run five or six miles to make the distance of our boat's length in the general course and direction we are traveling. It has been suggested that if it were possible to hitch on to the head of this river and draw it out straight, it would afford a navigable stream to the foot of the Rocky Mountains. There is plenty of water, however — not less than twenty-five or thirty feet anywhere in the channel. — Mr. Fawcett, the clerk, is drawing a correct map of this section of the stream, which will be a rare curiosity. It would take the premium for screwing and twisting at the World's Fair, and we hope it will be sent on by Le Duc.²⁰ — Capt. Dana is of opinion we will soon have a glimpse from a considerable distance at the new Fort site.

¹⁹ Less than two years after this was written a party of German colonists founded New Ulm at the mouth of the Cottonwood. A sketch of Sleepy Eyes, chief of the Cottonwood River band of Sisseton Sioux, is included among Stephen R. Riggs' "Dakota Portraits," *ante*, 2: 484-495.

²⁰ William Fawcett or Faucette was chief clerk on the "War Eagle" with Captain Harris in 1854. An exhibit for Minnesota Territory to be sent to the world's fair known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York City in 1853 was being assembled by William G. Le Duc. George B. Merrick and William R. Tibbals, "Genesis of Steamboating on Western Rivers: With a Register of Officers on the Upper Mississippi 1823-70," in State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Proceedings*, 1911, p. 125; William G. Le Duc, "Minnesota at the Crystal Palace Exhibition, New York, 1853," *ante*, 1: 351-368.

Twelve o'clock; aye, there it is, and some miles this side we have a fine view of

LA FRAMBOISE'S TRADING POST

This place is known as 'Little Rock'²¹ It is a noted point on the river; and we will proceed directly to it in a little less time than it took the Newton to travel there by stream from the spot where she first came in sight of it. We reached La Framboise's, then, at three o'clock P. M., distant from the Fort five miles by land and fifteen or twenty by water. The site of Little Rock is a bold point forming the extreme inner angle of one of the great bends of the river, and is skirted on either side with level and rich prairie land, extending back half a mile to the bluffs. The point is covered with huge granite rocks, some the size of medium dwelling houses. Some two hundred yards back from the river, Mr. La Framboise has his dwelling, trading and store houses, and other accompaniments to a post of this character—the whole enclosed with high and formidable pickets. The worthy old trader, who has resided in this lonely wilderness home since 1838, came down with his entire household to welcome us, greatly elated that his favorite wish was at length gratified by having a steamboat at his door. His situation is one of the most beautiful and imposing upon the river. The land about it is of the best quality, and no farmer in Minnesota has raised finer crops than Mr. La Framboise at Little Rock. He intends having his place laid out as a town site shortly, when those desirous of going into the very *highest* speculation upon the Minnesota river can take hold. There will be no town above it for many years, as the new military reserve approaches within half a mile. After wooding, and allowing our people to gratify their curiosity by a general survey of the premises, we shove off for

²¹ Joseph Laframboise began trading with the Sioux of southwestern Minnesota in 1822. At Little Rock he was an agent of the American Fur Company. See Riggs, *ante*, 2: 490. The Little Rock post is located on a tracing of a map of the Fort Ridgely area drawn by Lieutenant John Kelton, in the manuscript history of the fort. This map must have been prepared during the first year of the existence of the fort, since it was drawn by order of Major Samuel Woods, who was the commandant from May 21, 1853, to May 23, 1854.

THE FORT

After five or six more ramifications greater than any yet made, the Newton stopped her engines at the end of her journey at five o'clock. Five or six dragoons had been in charge of the place during the winter, who were now to be relieved by the superior force we had carried up. Soon the baggage was ashore, the tents pitched upon the green prairie, and the camp fires lighted. It is a beautiful spot, but until the buildings are completed, promises no such comfortable quarters as those left behind at Fort Snelling. The soldiers' wives view the scene with melancholy sensations and forebodings of hardship, sickness and death to themselves and children, from exposure to tent life during the summer. Few eyes are dry among them, while in some instances our sympathies are aroused by loud and bitter sobs. To be a soldier in the ranks is a hard and trying fate, but to be a soldier's wife, with a family of small children set down upon this remote and lonely frontier, with nothing but canvass to shelter them from the scorching rays of a summer's sun and the "peltings of the pitiless storm," is vastly more trying to the poor victims, and agonizing to the better feeling of humanity.

As we remained at the Fort until ten o'clock Saturday morning, a fine opportunity was afforded for viewing this new theatre of frontier defence. The location is beautiful and admirably chosen. The reserve has been laid off five miles square, one-half of which is on the Indian reservation and the other half upon the ceded lands. Little Rock river, a small stream, which is the lower boundary of the Indian reservation, enters the Minnesota about half a mile below the site of the Fort.²² The immediate site of the works is a level and elevated prairie, affording a fine view for many miles up and down the valley. The bluff in front is not abrupt, but slopes gradually toward the river. The hill side is covered with a beautiful grove of large oaks, which will afford a most magnificent park when the grounds are properly improved. — Between the base of the hill and the river's shore is a level

²² The military reservation of Fort Ridgely extended for seven miles along the Minnesota River with the fort as the center, was almost rhombic in shape, and contained 45.15 square miles, as shown on the Kelton map in the manuscript history of "Fort Ridgely, Minnesota."

piece of prairie, varying from twenty to a hundred yards in width. Looking out to the northwest from the site of the Fort, the eye rests upon the immense and almost interminable plain, extending to Red river and beyond. The prairie lands in the immediate vicinity of the Fort are very rich, with the best of opportunities for good farms and gardens for the use of the garrison. On the opposite side of the river are extensive bottom lands, which will afford all the timber and wood that will ever be required. We think Capt. Dana deserves credit for the selection he has made, although some of the soldiers appeared to think it the worst place they ever beheld.

The post is not yet named.²³ Capt. Monroe will have command until the arrival of Major Woods with his company from Iowa. The work of building the Fort will immediately commence. Several mechanics went up with us from St. Paul for this purpose, who have before them a two or three years' job. Mr. J[esse] H. Pomeroy of St. Paul is the master carpenter.²⁴ The walls and buildings are to be of stone, a species of granite, plenty of which is found immediately adjacent.

Saturday morning last opened most beautifully and gloriously, and from the summit of the high bluff one of the most magnificent views in the country lay before the eye. Its natural quiet was broken by the distant howling of the Tiger, whose steam could now be seen far down the serpentine river towards La Framboise's. — About nine o'clock, she arrived, and landed alongside the Newton. She was bound for the new Agency, thirty miles above; and started out from St. Paul with twenty head of cattle belonging to Robert Cummings, of St. Anthony, who has the contract for breaking ground at the Agency.²⁵ Cummings finding progress rather slow, took his cattle ashore at Traverse des Sioux, and proceeded to drive them up by land. He succeeded in reach-

²³ By a military order issued on June 27, 1853, the post was named Fort Ridgely in honor of three army officers who died in the Mexican War.

²⁴ Pomeroy settled in Minnesota in 1845 and did construction work at Fort Ripley from 1849 to 1851. "Fort Ridgely, Minnesota"; Warren Upham and Mrs. Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912*, 14: 607 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14).

²⁵ The agency established in 1853 was later known as the lower Sioux or Redwood agency. Andreas, *Atlas of Minnesota*, 179.

ing the Fort the same evening we did, beating the Royal Bengal several hours!

A few Indians were loitering about the grounds during the morning. They were Seeseetoans, belonging to 'Gun's' band.²⁶ One, a remarkably fine and noble looking young fellow, appeared to deeply interest our New York ladies, and presents were lavished upon him without stint. The evening previous but a solitary Indian was upon the ground when we landed. He stood for some minutes, resting upon his gun, and with the stoicism and taciturnity of the red man, contemplated the debarkation of the troops. One of the strangers remarked that he was in all probability reflecting upon the rapid inroads our people were making into his country, and looking forward to the time when all his race would fall and become extinct, buried beneath the rapidly advancing wave of Anglo-Saxon civilization. One better acquainted with Indians and Indian character, suggested that it was greatly more probable he was calculating the chances as to whether the barrels which were being rolled ashore contained whisky, and if so, how he would go to work to procure a portion of their contents. The Indian, at this juncture, seeing we were all laughing at him, shouldered his gun and marched off across the hills.

HOMEWARD BOUND

All things being in readiness, we took leave of our military friends at ten o'clock Saturday, and headed down stream. The wind was rising, and by the time we had been out an hour was blowing a furious gale. No running in this crooked stream to-day; so we are tied up in the bushes, with water all around us — prisoners for the time with no chance of getting ashore. Here we were held till late on Sunday afternoon, when the wind falling we proceeded. Mr. La Framboise got aboard at his place to come down with us, bringing the proceeds of his winter's traffic. Some eight or ten miles below his house we laid by for the night at a high and beautifully timbered bank. At this spot rests the mortal

²⁶ The first Indian to sign the treaty of Traverse des Sioux was Eenyangmanee (Inyangmani), whose name means "Running Walker" or "the Gun." He was chief of the Lac qui Parle band of Sioux. Samuel W. Pond, "The Dakotas or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12: 330; Riggs, *ante*, 2: 509, 510.

remains of Cameron, a noted Indian trader of the previous century, and a contemporary of the notorious Dixon.²⁷

Early the next day, we met the Clarion on her way up, about five miles below the mouth of Cotton-Wood. Many of our citizens were aboard, including Agent McLean with his effects for the new Agency.²⁸ Thus at this one time were three boats on the waters of the Minnesota, all above the highest point previously attained in navigating the river by steam, and one of them a first-class Upper Mississippi packet. This is something to be remembered and talked of.

Time and space admonish that we must cut our narrative short. We have many facts and pleasing incidents we would wish to note, but they must be deferred. As we advanced down the river, everything indicated great life and activity at the different settlements and landings. The Newton arrived at St. Paul Tuesday evening, having been absent just one week, nearly two days of which she was detained by wind. Every one on board returned highly pleased with the excursion. The journey as high up as the new Fort cannot fail to interest and greatly add to a knowledge of the vast resources of the Minnesota Valley. There will, perhaps, be many opportunities the present season for our citizens to make the trip, and we advise all who can do so not to let the occasions pass. The river is a navigable stream as far as the new sites of the government operations up the valley, and boats will go there whenever business will make paying trips.

We have returned more than ever convinced that the vast agricultural, and perhaps mineral, resources of this valley have not at

²⁷ Both Murdock Cameron and Robert Dickson traded in the Minnesota country as early as 1805. Cameron died in 1811 while on a canoe voyage down the Minnesota and was buried on a bluff near Lac qui Parle. During the War of 1812 Dickson was untiring in his efforts to keep the Indians of the Northwest firm in their alliance with the British. "Pike's Explorations in Minnesota, 1805-6," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1: 375 (1872); George W. Featherstonhaugh, *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnay Sotor*, 2: 315 (London, 1847); Louis A. Tohill, *Robert Dickson, British Fur Trader on the Upper Mississippi* (1927).

²⁸ Nathaniel McLean was Sioux agent at Fort Snelling from 1849 to 1853. He was succeeded at Fort Ridgely by R. G. Murphy on May 28, 1853. Indian Office, *Reports*, 1853, p. 74.

all been exaggerated — rather underrated than otherwise. Rich and desirable farming lands there are in abundance every mile, with all the facilities of timber and water, as well as fine building stone. Iron we are certain will be found in abundance and we are much deceived if immense coal fields should prove to be a great distance off.

Correspondence of the *Minnesotian*

LETTERS FROM THE MINNESOTA VALLEY

Traverse des Sioux, April 29, 1853.

MESSRS. EDITORS:— The book of the future for Traverse des Sioux and the region of the upper Minnesota beyond us, opens with the promise of a very active summer. The speculation so rife in St. Paul during the winter, in Traverse des Sioux lots, are apparently about to bear some substantial fruit. You would be surprised to see the quantity of squared timber that has been got out the past three or four months, and which fairly crowds up the main street.²⁹— Among it I notice the heavy and substantial timbers for the frame of Sibley's new warehouse, at the landing, 40 feet by 80, handsomely got by D. R. Kennedy, who is in charge of the Fur Company's Outfit here, and who was an old hand at such business in Canada. George McLeod, Martin's brother, a regular go-ahead citizen, an old Ottawa river timber merchant, has likewise two heavy frames out — one for a warehouse 40 feet by 26, and the other for a dwelling.³⁰ Besides these, I count 23 buildings of various kinds, most of them large, for which the frames and part of the lumber are on the ground, or being sawed, and which are under contract to be put up in the next two months. Every steamboat lands large lots of lumber, supplies and passengers. The Greek Slave was the first arrival on the 7th of

²⁹ Trading in shares of prospective towns in the Sioux country seems to have been the cause of considerable excitement in St. Paul in the spring of 1853. Traverse des Sioux figures prominently in the columns of the *Minnesotian* during the winter of 1852–53, both in the news items and the communications, and the reader gets the impression that the town had an active set of promoters. *Minnesotian*, March 19, 1853.

³⁰ George A. McLeod went to Minnesota as a trader in 1852 and located on a claim at Traverse des Sioux. Upham and Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 476.

April;³¹ the Clarion on the 22d was the next; and the Tiger on the 27th the third; and all disgorged a great deal of freight at the landing. I almost forgot to mention that one of the buildings going up, is a hotel by Mr. [George H.] Spencer, and another, a large livery stable by Mr. Myrick,³² while Benj. Thompson, Esq., has contracted for the erection of a series of fine tenements under one roof, 105 by 24 feet; and Jack Frazier for a trading house and dwelling 40 feet by 32.³³ Besides the importation of lumber from below, two saw-mills are now in active operation, to supply building materials for the people of the Traverse. About four or five miles above, J. W. Babcock has a mill — what is termed an over-shot wheel and muley saw — which is rapping away in fine style at the rate of 8000 or 9000 feet a day, with some 500 logs on the ground, ready for a brisk summer's business. Basswood, the different varieties of oak, huge cottonwood, plenty of black and white walnut, with hachberry and ash, are his principal timber, and there's plenty of it. He delivers his timber at the Traverse for \$14 per M. It is about a mile and a half above this mill, on the same side of the river that the new town of *Kah-so-tah* has just been laid out, on a most beautiful site; and as it commands an extensive back country, with convenience of access to it, and facilities for a fine ferry, and the best point I know of for a bridge in case the Railroad from Dubuque should ever come in this direction.³⁴ I think it will grow into a town of some importance,

³¹ Captain Robert's steamboat "Greek Slave" plied normally in the St. Louis and St. Paul trade, but in the spring of 1853 it made a trip up the Minnesota before the ice went out of Lake Pepin. *Minnesotian*, April 2, 1853.

³² The reference is probably to Nathan Myrick, a well-known Indian trader who had establishments in various new towns along the Minnesota at this time. T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota*, 85 (St. Paul, 1886).

³³ Joseph Jack Frazier or Frazer was a Sioux mixed-blood who, after numerous exciting experiences with Indian war parties, became a fur-trader. He acted as a scout during the Sioux War of 1862. A series of articles about his "Life and Adventures," by Henry H. Sibley, who wrote under the name of "Walker-in-the-Pines," appears in the Sunday issues of the *St. Paul Pioneer* from December 2, 1866, to March 17, 1867.

³⁴ The Winona and St. Peter Railroad, later a part of the Chicago and Northwestern system, crossed the Minnesota at Kasota in 1871. Gresham, *Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties*, 2: 541.

equal to Le Sueur, below it, and second only to the Traverse in size and business. Its advantages are probably as great as any town site on the *lower* side of the river. Its convenience to Babcock's mill will facilitate its growth; for the difficulty of obtaining lumber is the most serious drawback generally experienced by new towns in their early starting. Besides Babcock's mill there is another also on the lower side of the river, a little below this place, — an old fashioned flutter-wheel mill, belonging to Antoin Young, — which is likewise sawing away successfully. The mill will be quite an advantage to the building operations of the people of Le Sueur a few miles below it. Both mills have only started within a couple of weeks.

The Indians are gathering in here quite thick again, from the sugar-bush. They made a considerable amount of sugar. In their liking for sweetmeats they are perfect children; and their physician, Dr. Foster, has several cases of serious sickness arising from their gorging themselves to excess with this food exclusively, in the bush.³⁵ There are some reports in regard to the upper Indians, which excited fears for their safety. A letter from Patterson's Rapids, (85 miles by land, and over 150 miles by water above,) says: "As yet there has been no news of the Seeseetoan Sioux, or Robe Hunters; and the Indians hereabouts, as well as whites of Yellow Medicine Wood river, (Dr. Williamson's place,) think it most probable they are all dead — shut in from all communication by the deep snow, until they starved or froze to death."³⁶ And I fear those suspicions may prove too correct; but hope for the best."

Since the foregoing letter was received, Geo. McLeod, Esq., has arrived from Lac-qui-Parle in a huge cottonwood canoe, 25 feet long and 44 inches across the middle, and made of a single

³⁵ Dr. Thomas Foster acted as secretary to the commissioners who negotiated the Sioux treaties of 1851 and then served for a short time as physician for the Sioux. Newson, *Pen Pictures*, 151; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 287, 288.

³⁶ Patterson's Rapids were named for a trader, Charles Patterson, who located at that point about 1783. Dr. Thomas S. Williamson established his mission station at Yellow Medicine in October, 1852. Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 458 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 17); Indian Office, *Reports*, 1853, p. 75-77.

tree — bringing down in her besides her crew and a lot of stuff, 40 bushels of seed potatoes! Mr. McLeod says that early in the winter the Seeseetoans were heard from — that they had fallen in with plenty of buffalo, and had already made a large *cache* of dried meat; and that though nothing has been heard from them since, it is not improbable they fared well, and will turn up after awhile.

I am sorry to learn that Dr. Williamson's lady, at the Yellow Medicine Missionary Station, had a severe fall on the 5th of April, by which three or four of her ribs were broken. — The Doctor appears particularly unfortunate since he left Kaposia and removed to his present location. Early in the winter, he was so unfortunate as to have his ox-teams and supplies buried in the great snowstorm; the teamsters barely escaping with their lives; and he and his people were only saved from starvation during the winter by the missionaries at Lac-qui-Parle packing provisions down to him on the ice. It is to be hoped the worst of his trials are now over.

The Minnesota has only been moderately high this season, and is now falling fast. The Tiger came up into and landed her freight and passengers near the old missionary houses, on what is marked as the "Canal" on the town plat; and then passed up through it into the main river, saving about two miles by the operation. The larger boats could have done the same but for their barges. Mr. Cummings, of St. Anthony, who has the contract for breaking the 600 acres at the new Agency, landed ten yoke of oxen from the Tiger with a wagon or two, preferring to make the land portage of 40 or 50 miles, than steam 140, to reach the same point, on the most crooked and difficult part of the river. The Tiger then went on with the rest of her freight to the new Fort.

The next day about noon, the West Newton came surging up, herself and barge heavily loaded with the troops and supplies for the new Fort. I had the pleasure of greeting my friend, Captain James Monroe, Jr., (who, by the way, if we are to select a military man from a Fort, is admirably fitted by his talents and public services for the position of Whig candidate for Territorial Delegate,) and Lieut. Kelton of the Sixth Infantry, while another of my friends known as John P. Owens, Esq., Editor of the Minne-

sotian, loomed up on the hurricane deck, large as life and just as natural — “a chiel among them takin’ notes,” I suppose. The Newton stopped but a few moments to land a passenger or two, and then dashed ahead.

The next day in the afternoon, the Clarion came snorting up, loaded to the guards, with two or three barges in tow. She crowded our landing with every variety of stuffs, passengers, and live stock; and then pushed on for the new Agency. Agent M’Lean, with Mr. [Philander] Prescott, the Interpreter,³⁷ and Messrs. [Andrew] Robertson and Moer [*Hazen Mooers*], Indian Farmers at Kaposia and Black Dog village, were on board, with a great lot of lumber and supplies for the new Agency. — This will not be located at the mouth of the Redwood, as is the general impression, but three or four miles this side, nearer the timber.³⁸

So you see from all this, that civilized life and enterprize is born upon the Upper Minnesota.

THE

D. U. S.

³⁷ Philander Prescott at this time was superintendent of farming for the Sioux. Indian Office, Reports, 1852, in 32 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 1, p. 353-355 (serial 658).

³⁸ One of Murphy’s first acts upon succeeding McLean was to move the new agency site slightly nearer to the new fort than was originally planned. Indian Office, *Reports*, 1853, p. 74.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).