

EARLY MINNESOTA RAILROADS AND THE QUEST FOR SETTLERS

Within the period of the last generation the United States has evolved a narrow and rigid basis for the restriction of immigration. In sharp contrast to this policy was the attitude of encouragement adopted by national and state governments in the sixties, seventies, and eighties of the nineteenth century. European emigrants, impelled by the propaganda resulting from the earlier attitude and attracted by the vast, unclaimed regions in the West, flocked to the American shores by the tens of thousands. Added to the activities of governmental agencies to attract immigrants were the efforts of new and struggling railroads in the trans-Mississippi territory to draw to that region passengers and potential shippers and consumers. Competition became keen, and the railroad companies of Minnesota, like those of other states, saw the feasibility, not to mention the necessity, of setting out upon a quest for settlers. The first rails in the state were laid in 1862, and after that, with the exception of the period of depression following the panic of 1873, construction proceeded with an ever increasing impetus, until, by 1880, the state had nearly thirty-one hundred miles of line, and its southern, central, and western portions were fairly well gridironed with rails. To be sure, there were still sections that were not adequately served by railroads, but for the most part the lines were so situated as to aid greatly in the continued influx of settlers and the export of indigenous products.¹

By no means the least fundamental of the problems con-

¹ Minnesota Commissioner of Statistics, *Reports*, 1880, p. 247. For brief statements about early Minnesota railroad construction see William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2: 329; 3: 2, 60-62, 141 (St. Paul, 1924, 1926).

nected with the early construction of railroads in Minnesota was that of colonization—colonization, not only of railroad lands, but of government lands as well. Hazardous railway ventures could meet with success only as a result of the early and steady infiltration of people from Europe and eastern North America, and shrewd railway men, as well as their supporting financiers, realized this fact. The problem of colonization was perhaps second in importance only to that of the original financing and constructing of lines. Objections of prospective colonists—the hesitancy to undertake a long overland journey, the fear of cutting ties with the homeland and settling in a new and uninhabited region, and the dread of the cold and bitter winters—had to be ridden down before the railroads could carry on profitably and extensively their quest for settlers.

Official encouragement of immigration to Minnesota began about the time of the organization of the territory in 1849 and continued throughout the territorial period. As competition for settlers grew keener among the states of the upper Mississippi Valley, the state government, which was established in 1858, developed the policy of encouragement originated by the territorial legislature and continued it through the sixties and seventies.² Similar policies on the part of the railroad companies obviously could not come until after 1862, and, as a matter of fact, the roads took little active interest in promoting settlement until just before 1870. The possibility of synchronizing the efforts of state and railroad agencies early made itself apparent.

It was not until the late sixties, however, that the state and the railroads began to function coöperatively in encouraging settlement, though for many years the attitude

² Livia Appel and Theodore C. Blegen, "Official Encouragement of Immigration to Minnesota during the Territorial Period," *ante*, 5: 167-203; Commissioner of Statistics, *Reports*, 1875, p. 118; Theodore C. Blegen, "The Competition of the Northwestern States for Immigrants," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 3: 3-29 (September, 1919); Folwell, *Minnesota*, 3: 1.

of the state legislature on government aid to railroad construction had made it evident that this coöperation would eventually develop.³ The Northern Pacific Railroad Company in 1866—two years after its incorporation and four years before building operations actually started—contemplated the “establishment of a Bureau of Emigration for the purpose of settlement of the lands of the Company” and proposed sending a director to Germany and other parts of northern Europe. In order that the character of the mission might be made more impressive, the company endeavored to obtain official state recognition for an agent of this kind from Governor William R. Marshall of Minnesota, who responded that it afforded him “pleasure to give an official letter to such an agent with the view of inducing emigrants to settle upon the lands of the company in this State.” In September Marshall appointed William S. Rowland of the Northern Pacific as “Special Commissioner of the State of Minnesota to the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867,” a position that carried no stipend since it was not authorized by law.⁴

Early in 1869 the suggestion was made that the work of the state board of immigration be made continuous and permanent, and that a new and more extensive scheme of

³ This attitude is reflected in the governors' messages, the *Journals* of the Minnesota senate and house, and Congressional publications. Many of the latter include memorials and resolutions of the Minnesota legislature asking government aid for railroads and often suggesting the importance of the roads in the future settlement of the state. For examples of such memorials, see 36 Congress, 2 session, *House Documents*, no. 36 (serial 1103); 37 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 55 (serial 1124); 40 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Documents*, nos. 27, 59, 72 (serial 1319).

⁴ William S. Rowland to Marshall, May 15, 1866; Marshall to Rowland, May 22, September 24, 1866 (copies), in Executive Records, vol. D, p. 58, 95, Governor's Archives. These archives are now in the custody of the Minnesota Historical Society. A number of the documents cited from the archives have been published by Theodore C. Blegen under the title “Minnesota's Campaign for Immigrants: Illustrative Documents,” in the *Yearbook* of the Swedish Historical Society of America, 11: 29-83 (1926).

advertising than had been used hitherto be devised.⁵ In March Albert Wolff was made state commissioner of immigration for Germany, a position he held for two years. In May, 1869, Henry Warfeld of St. Paul was commissioned as agent of the state commissioners of immigration to protect immigrants after their arrival at St. Paul; Peter Engberg of Red Wing was to hold the same position at Chicago; and William Abell of Minneapolis, at Milwaukee. Other appointments were made in November, 1870, when Charles D. O'Reilly was made "general traveling emigration agent for Minnesota," and D. Wanvig was selected as emigration agent to the kingdom of Norway and Sweden for a period of seven months. In the same month the governor appointed as delegates to the Indianapolis convention on immigration Hans Mattson, secretary of state; Colonel Rowland; E. Page Davis, commissioner of immigration for Minnesota in New York; and William Pfaender of New Ulm.⁶ These appointments and an advertising campaign carried on about the same time are evidences of the fact that the state was to work along with the newly instituted immigration departments of the railroads in making a more determined bid for immigrants.⁷

Several detached incidents will serve to illustrate the extent to which the state and the railroads coöperated. When Hans Mattson presented his resignation as secretary of state early in 1871 to go to Europe for one of

⁵ Henry A. Castle to Marshall, March 3, 1869, in file 635, Governor's Archives.

⁶ Wolff to board of immigration, July 25, 1871, in file 608; Executive Records, vol. D, p. 411, 536, Governor's Archives. For more specific information about the Indianapolis convention, see George M. Stephenson, *A History of American Immigration, 1820-1924*, 140, 253 (Boston, 1926). A record of Wolff's activities may be found in his report to Governor Horace Austin, September 7, 1870, in file 608, Governor's Archives.

⁷ Reference to the distribution of thousands of advertising pamphlets is to be found in file 608, Governor's Archives. See especially L. K. Aaker to Austin, January 1, 1870; E. Page Davis to Austin, August 24, 1870; report of John Schroeder to Austin, 1871.

the railroad companies, the governor refused to accept the resignation but consented to give him a leave of absence until fall. The governor apparently agreed with Mattson's opinion that "it was of greater importance to the public, and I could render better service to the state at this period of its early development, as agent for a great railroad company, which fact was fully recognized by our leading public men, and it was with their advice and at their earnest request that I took the step."⁸

In several instances the railroad companies actually contributed funds to the state board of immigration and toward financing the activities of state agents in different parts of the country. When Colonel W. F. Gray, foreign emigrant agent for Minnesota, canvassed New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in 1870, the Milwaukee and St. Paul contributed a hundred dollars toward his expenses.⁹ The accounts of the state board in later years show that large portions of the funds it used came from railroad companies.¹⁰

When commenting upon the activities of state agents in various parts of the United States and Canada, John Schroeder, clerk of the board of immigration, in his report of 1871 noted that the work was done best, perhaps, by experienced railroad men who served without expense to the state board. The office of E. Page Davis, Minnesota's New York representative, was supplied with maps and views of the state by the Lake Superior and Mississippi and the St. Paul and Sioux City railroad companies. The former road also supplied a collection of products raised along its right of way.¹¹ William Abell, agent at Milwau-

⁸ Hans Mattson, *Reminiscences: The Story of an Emigrant*, 121 (St. Paul, 1891).

⁹ Clipping from the *Tri-Weekly Publisher* (Haverhill, N. H.), August 30, 1870; Gray to Austin, August 31, 1870, in file 608, Governor's Archives.

¹⁰ Some accounts of the board of immigration for the years from 1877 to 1880 are in file 201, Governor's Archives.

¹¹ Reports of Schroeder and Davis to Austin, 1871, in file 608, Governor's Archives.

kee, reported to the state board in 1869 that the Milwaukee and St. Paul was assisting his office to aid immigrants at that place by furnishing teams for transportation of baggage from the steamboat landings to the depots, by supplying food to the poor when they called for it, by giving free transportation over its lines when credibly informed of the need, and by allowing hundreds to travel with baggage as security for their fares. At New York, Davis obtained from John W. Abbott, assistant general passenger agent of the Erie Railway Company, a reduction of one-third on transportation fare for all families of immigrants embarking for Minnesota from the principal points in the East. The Erie also carried fifty pounds of surplus baggage free. Samuel C. Hough, general eastern agent for the Lake Superior and Mississippi, announced to Davis that his road was ready to grant every reasonable facility for cheap transportation.¹²

That there was another side to the matter, however, is evident from a letter to Governor Austin written at St. Paul on the stationery of the consulate of the North German Confederation. The writer complains that immigrants were packed into inferior cars, without comforts and conveniences; that the cars were often attached to freight trains; and that people were sometimes obliged to lay over at isolated stations for many hours with no shelter and no facilities for procuring food and water.¹³

The work of the Northern Pacific illustrates how all the land-grant railroads endeavored to encourage the settlement of their lands, although no other road used such an elaborate organization.¹⁴ Its land department, created in the

¹² Reports of Abell to state board of immigration, 1869, and of Davis to Austin, 1871, in file 608, Governor's Archives.

¹³ F. Willius to Austin, October 26, 1871, in file 608, Governor's Archives.

¹⁴ For a thorough discussion of the Northern Pacific organization, see James B. Hedges, "The Colonization Work of the Northern Pacific Railroad," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13:314-319 (December, 1926).

late sixties, was supplemented in its activity by a bureau of emigration, the purpose of which was to stimulate emigration to Minnesota and the West beyond. A general European agency was set up in London, with subagencies and agents throughout the British Isles and the countries of northern Europe. Arrangements were made with various steamship companies to grant special favors to settlers bound for Northern Pacific lands, and in the ports of entry of the United States and Canada special agents were appointed to aid the new arrivals. The sending out of lecturers to all parts of northern Europe, the distribution of circular letters and descriptive literature, the publication of propaganda sheets, the employment of native agents—all these methods were used to acquaint Europeans with the attractions of the new and unsettled lands of the great Northwest. The well-organized emigration departments built up by the Northern Pacific and other roads during the early seventies were utilized by the land departments of the various roads for distributing advertising material. The railroad companies had something to sell, and an extensive advertising campaign seemed the best way to get information about their commodity before the people who might be interested. By means of pamphlets, newspaper advertising, lectures, bureaus of information, and exhibits the railroad companies, like the state government, attempted to spread information about life in Minnesota.

Perhaps the most popular and productive advertising scheme involved the use of pamphlets, circulars, and folders. This method was adopted by the Northern Pacific and probably by all the other land-grant roads.¹⁵ Some of these publications merely contained statements of the advantages of Minnesota for agricultural and industrial development, telling of its natural resources, potential water

¹⁵ In addition to the Northern Pacific, the writer has found pamphlets for the St. Paul and Pacific and its successor, the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba; the Lake Superior and Mississippi; the St. Paul and Sioux City; and the Winona and St. Peter roads.

power, fertile soils, and wealth of forests. Others, however, were guides to the lands of the companies, giving their location, the terms on which they might be purchased, and the inducements that the company would offer to those who bought and settled and tilled the soil. Always there was included a glowing account of Minnesota's healthful climate and promise of future prosperity.

A typical example of the former class is an eight-page pamphlet issued by the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad about 1870.¹⁶ In describing Minnesota and its geographical location, the writer of this pamphlet points out that "the situation of Minnesota gives it an immensely wider capacity of interior trade, and a far easier access to the sources of supply of raw material. A region six times as large as all New England is directly dependent upon Minnesota for all the manufactures it may consume." The suggestion is made that the Falls of St. Anthony are capable of developing a hundred and twenty thousand horsepower; enough to drive the twenty-five million spindles of four thousand mills of England and Scotland, and that Sauk Rapids is second only to St. Anthony. The wheat and corn-raising qualities of Minnesota's soil are compared with those of the soils of other states leading in the production of those grains, much to the advantage of the former. The educational opportunities for children and the industrial openings for laboring men are not overlooked in the statement. "In short, a healthy climate, unsurpassed fertility of the soil, free schools, railroads springing up in every direction, navigable rivers, smooth and hard roads, a splendid and great variety

¹⁶The pamphlet is entitled *Minnesota and Its Advantages to Settlers*. With much other material used in the preparation of this paper, it is to be found in the archives of the Great Northern Railroad at St. Paul. Most of the material is preserved in a large scrapbook, which will be referred to as the Great Northern Scrapbook. The present pamphlet is on page 9 of this volume. The writer is indebted to Mr. James Stoddard and Mr. William J. Hilligoss of the railroad's land department for permission to use this material.

of scenery, all combine to make Minnesota the state, *par excellence*, to which the emigrant, the man of capital and of enterprise should look."

A much more complete publication of this nature was issued by the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba road just after it had assimilated the St. Paul and Pacific in 1879.¹⁷ The road at that time was under the general managership of James J. Hill. D. A. McKinlay, its land commissioner, sent a form letter to the numerous settlers living along the lines of the road, with a questionnaire inquiring about the nearest station of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba; the general character and average depth of the soil; the number of acres under cultivation; the acreage in wheat and other grains; the amount threshed; and the like. The results of this inquiry were published in the booklet mentioned above, consisting of forty-six pages and giving information of the type that a prospective settler would desire. Copies of these booklets were sent with a circular letter to business men who lived along the lines of the road, and they were asked to inform the company of other individuals, either in the United States or in Europe, who might be interested in Minnesota's attractions.¹⁸ Of the first edition of the booklet, there were printed ten thousand copies

¹⁷ St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway Company, *Facts about Minnesota* (St. Paul, 1879). The pamphlet includes an excellent map of Minnesota, showing the state's railroad mileage in 1879.

¹⁸ The circular letter, which was dated October 8, 1879, stated in part:

Believing that you are interested in the settlement and prosperity of the State, we invite you to co-operate with this Department in securing a bonafide distribution of the work.

If you will send to this office the names and addresses of any of your friends in this country or Europe, who would be likely to feel an interest in *your part of the State*, or may feel inclined to emigrate from their present homes—or if you could procure such names from your customers, we will take pleasure in mailing copies, post-paid, to all such, in English, German, Swedish or Norwegian languages, as the addresses might indicate.

A copy of the circular is in the Great Northern Scrapbook, p. 84. It is signed by McKinlay.

in English, five thousand in German, and three thousand in Norwegian.¹⁹

Minnesota must have appeared a golden haven to readers of this and similar publications. Some excerpts from a guide that gives a glowing picture of the state follow:

The whole surface of the State is literally begemmed with innumerable lakes. . . . Their picturesque beauty and loveliness, with their pebbly bottoms, transparent waters, wooded shores and sylvan associations, must be seen to be fully appreciated.

. . . There is no Western State better supplied with forests. . . .

The assertion that the climate of Minnesota is one of the healthiest in the world, may be broadly and confidently made. . . .

Minnesota . . . may now justly boast of possessing the most munificent endowment for educational purposes of any State in the Union.²⁰

The distribution of these pamphlets was accomplished by various schemes and devices. For European distribution, the Northern Pacific usually shipped pamphlets to its London agency, which was responsible for their redistribution to the various English and continental agents, though in some cases the supplies were sent directly to the local representatives of the company.²¹ Resident agents of the steamship lines and of employment agencies were sometimes pressed into service to assist in the distribution, and apparently they complied willingly. For distribution in Minnesota, the advertising literature of the Northern Pa-

¹⁹ See marginal notation in Great Northern Scrapbook, p. 86. Numerous pamphlets of a similar type are to be found in this scrapbook and in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁰ *Guide to the Lands of the First Division of the Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad Company. Main Line*, 5, 6 (St. Paul, 1870).

²¹ C. A. Wackerhagen to George Sheppard, November 7, 1872 (duplicate); J. G. Dudley to Sheppard, November 20, 1872; Sheppard to Dudley, December 7, 1872; George B. Hibbard to Karl Möllersvärd, March 4, 1873 (copy), in "Foreign Agents," vols. 2, 5. The volumes cited are among sixteen bound volumes of letters in the archives of the land department of the Northern Pacific Railroad at St. Paul. They bear the following titles: "Foreign Agents," "Lands and Colonies," "Minnesota Agents," "Soldiers' Colonies," "Foreign Emigration," "Yeovil Colony," "Red River Colony," and "Detroit Lake Colony." For a fuller explanation of the nature of this material, see *ante*, 10: 131n.

cific was forwarded to the St. Paul agent.²² Most of the other companies had their guides and pamphlets printed in St. Paul or Chicago.

No estimate can be made of the extent to which newspaper advertising was used, but a survey of almost any Minnesota newspaper of the period, or of the correspondence of various agents and officials of the railroad companies, suggests that much of it was done.²³ At the Minnesota state fairs of 1872 and 1873, the Northern Pacific, the St. Paul and Pacific, and the Lake Superior and Mississippi railroads arranged exhibits in order to show improvements made in their lines and in the country they traversed, and to get their cause before the people. At the Vienna Exposition of 1873, the Northern Pacific was represented by Colonel von Corvin, its German agent, who prepared exhibits of products forwarded to him from Minnesota.²⁴

One of the greatest difficulties with which the railway land departments were confronted was that of getting prospective settlers to inspect their lands. Although many were willing to buy through agents of the companies or through sponsors of colonies without seeing what they were getting, that probably was not true of the majority. In order to meet this problem, the board of directors of the Northern Pacific passed a resolution on November 17, 1871, which provided that land-exploration tickets should be sold at full fare, but that persons who took such tickets and within sixty days thereafter purchased a minimum of forty acres of land from the company should be credited with the amount of the fare on their purchase, and should be entitled to free tickets for themselves and their families when

²² Elis Lyon to John S. Loomis, October 2 [?], 1871; T. L. Parker to Loomis, August 11, 1871, in "Foreign Emigration"; Wright to Dudley, June 10, July 10, 1872, in "Minnesota Agents," vol. 2.

²³ Numerous Minnesota newspapers for the seventies are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

²⁴ Clippings from *State Fair Bulletin*, September 25, 26, 1873, in *Great Northern Scrapbook*; Sheppard to Von Corvin, April 21, 1873 (copy), in "Foreign Agents," vol. 3.

going to settle upon the lands purchased.²⁵ Most of the companies permitted all newcomers who purchased land to deduct from the purchase price the amount paid out for travel on their lines. The Northern Pacific allowed a reduction of one-third of the regular rate upon all freight shipped over its lines for settlers, and also effected arrangements with the Grand Trunk Railroad Company in Canada, whereby extra baggage was not charged for unless it was of an exceptional quantity. It was also arranged that such baggage need not be examined by customs officials. The St. Paul and Pacific, in 1876, after the bonds of the company had declined in value to less than thirty-five cents on the dollar, granted a reduction of fifty per cent on both passenger and freight rates to those who would settle on its lands.²⁶

Many of the people who went to Minnesota from Europe and the crowded portions of the United States took with them enough capital to start life in the new region, but the majority arrived with nothing more than native ability and an inherent desire to succeed. For these the railroad companies made provision in the form of small cash payments and long-time credit on the purchase of company lands. As early as 1864 the branch line of the St. Paul and Pacific through the upper Mississippi Valley offered for sale 307,000 acres of timber, meadow, and prairie lands in tracts of forty acres or more. They were sold for cash, the real estate bonds of the company, or on credit. Although the formal announcement had not yet been made, the main line of the road was nearly ready to offer 600,000 acres for

²⁵ George B. Hibbard, *Land Department of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. Bureau of Immigration for Soldiers and Sailors*, inside front cover (New York, 1871).

²⁶ Hibbard to Frederick Billings, July 11, 1872, in "Minnesota Agents," vol. 2; E. Holloway to Hibbard, May 28, 1873, in "Foreign Emigration"; interview with Mr. William Fisher of St. Paul, February 12, 1927. Mr. Fisher was superintendent of the St. Paul and Pacific, assistant general manager of the First Division of this road, and he later became president of the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad.

sale. By 1872 this road was selling lands for from five to fifteen dollars per acre, with ten years credit for those who desired it. A reduction of a dollar an acre was made on cash sales. As a convenience settlers were offered the opportunity to leave their payments with the nearest station agent for transmission to the railroad's general land office.²⁷

In 1871 it was possible to buy Northern Pacific lands for a down payment of ten per cent and seven annual installments, the unpaid balance carrying seven per cent interest. The company announced that its first mortgage land-grant gold bonds, then selling at par, would be received in payment for lands at a ten per cent premium. By 1877 Northern Pacific lands were selling for prices ranging from two and a half to ten dollars per acre, depending on the character of the soil and the proximity to a railroad station.²⁸

When William L. Banning, president and land commissioner of the Lake Superior and Mississippi, announced 1,632,000 acres of his company's lands for sale in 1869, he stated that long-term purchases would be accepted. Two years later these lands were selling for from two and a half to six dollars per acre, and, with a down payment of ten per cent, eight years might be taken for discharging the residue. In 1877, the same terms were offered, but in 1879, five dollars per acre was the minimum price, and no interest was charged on the eight annual installments.²⁹ Southern Minnesota Railroad lands in the latter part of the

²⁷ Circular of the land department of the St. Paul and Pacific, 1864; "Notice" from the office of Herman Trott, in *Great Northern Scrapbook*, p. 3, 48; *Guide to the Lands of the First Division of the St. Paul and Pacific*, 12.

²⁸ Circular issued by Loomis on July 1, 1871, in "Detroit Lake Colony"; James B. Power to T. M. Metcalf, December 26, 1877, in Commissioner of Statistics, *Reports*, 1877, p. 156-159.

²⁹ *Duluth Minnesotian*, November 13, 1869; Frank H. Clark, *Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad, St. Paul to Duluth, Minn. Lands for Emigrants*, 3, 9 (New York, n. d.); Philip S. Harris to Metcalf, December 21, 1877; to John P. Jacobson, December 3, 1879, in Commissioner of Statistics, *Reports*, 1877, p. 152-155; 1879, p. 211.

decade sold for from five to ten dollars per acre, payable in seven installments with seven per cent interest. The terms of the St. Paul and Sioux City were two and a half to five dollars for cash, or double that amount for five years' credit at seven per cent interest. The Winona and St. Peter offered its lands in the southern portion of the state for from two to nine dollars; payments could be made during five years, but a twelve and a half per cent deduction was made for cash.³⁰

Arrangements were made by the St. Paul and Pacific even before 1870 whereby a settler on railroad lands before they were opened to sale and settlement was cared for adequately. It was necessary that such a settler enter into an agreement with the company in which the amount ultimately to be paid by him "is fixed at the time of making such agreement. The Company then requires the payment of the interest at seven per cent on such sum every year in advance, until ready to give a deed." If the settler was unable to pay in full for his land at the time of receiving the deed, he might enter into a new contract with the company for a period of ten years. He was expected to clear and cultivate a certain number of acres the first year. The object of this offer was "the settlement, improvement and development of the country through which our line passes; we shall gladly co-operate with all who sincerely desire to promote these ends."³¹

It was the aim of certain roads to encourage large-scale farming, and for this purpose the St. Paul and Pacific issued circulars explaining in some detail how a settler could get more than a thousand acres of government land at an initial outlay of a little more than two hundred dollars. By

³⁰ Letter to Metcalf, December 5, 1877; John K. Brown to Metcalf, December 3, 1877; Charles E. Simmons to Jacobson, in Commissioner of Statistics, *Reports*, 1877, p. 147, 148-150; 1878, p. 121.

³¹ See a copy of an agreement made with a settler in the sixties, a one-page circular, and a poster from Herman Trott, in *Great Northern Scrapbook*, p. 7, 9.

taking advantage of the homestead, preëmption, and tree-planting laws, he could secure the following lands: eighty acres of homestead lands free within ten miles of the railroad, or a hundred and sixty acres beyond that limit; a hundred and sixty acres of preëmption lands at two and a half dollars per acre within the ten mile limit or a dollar and a quarter outside that limit; a hundred and sixty acres free for planting trees. Thus a settler could secure four hundred acres within ten miles of a railroad, or four hundred and eighty acres outside that limit, at a cost of but four hundred dollars in the first case, or two hundred dollars in the second. In addition to this government land a section of railroad land could be taken for which no cash or annual payments needed to be made until the end of three and a half years, when it was to be paid for at the rate of six dollars per acre. The purchaser was required to break all the land during the first year, cultivate it each subsequent year, and have forty acres of timber planted and growing and the whole tract fenced by the third year.³²

Another scheme designed to encourage speedy settlement and rapid cultivation was used by the St. Paul and Pacific toward the latter part of the seventies. It was a system of rebates granted for the breaking and cropping of land. The rebates, according to a circular issued by the railroad about 1879, were granted in the following manner:

In case the purchaser shall break 10 acres or more on an 80 acre tract, 20 acres or more on a 160 acre tract, 50 acres or more on a 320 acre tract, 100 acres or more on a 640 acre tract during the first breaking season after the purchase, he will be allowed \$2.50 per acre for breaking. A like allowance will be allowed for breaking done the second and third years after said date of purchase, provided the minimum amount above named be broken each year. . . .

If there be put in a crop, on or before the third year after the first breaking season, 50 or 60 acres on a 80 acre tract, 100 to 120

³² See circulars in *Great Northern Scrapbook*, p. 35, 47, 49, 50, 61. In some of these circulars the cost of starting the work of cultivation on a section of land is outlined.

acres on a 160 acre tract, 200 to 240 acres on a 320 acre tract, 400 to 480 acres on a 640 acre tract, the Company will allow an additional fifty cents per acre for the amount so put in crop; making \$3 in all for breaking and cultivation. This \$3 will be allowed to an extent of three-fourths of the acreage of the land purchased, but no more.

A contract in which these stipulations were included was provided by the company, and each settler who hoped to get rebates for breaking and cropping was required to sign one and to report to the office of the land examiner.³³

Numerous aids were provided for the protection of the Minnesota-bound European from the time when he left his old home until he was fairly well settled in his new one. Assistance was likewise rendered, in some instances, to new and struggling communities which were finding the rigors of frontier life more severe than they had anticipated or than they were able to meet unaided. Aid was given at the European ports of exit by the agents of the various railroad companies. At New York, and at certain other American and Canadian ports of entry, some of the companies stationed representatives who furnished information to and facilitated the business of the immigrants. These agents arranged that the immigrants be met by men of their own nationality, purchased their railroad tickets, checked their baggage, placed them on the right trains, and, in the cases of some large groups, provided experienced guides.³⁴ Similar service was given by most of the companies, as well as by the state of Minnesota, at Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Duluth.

Upon the arrival of the immigrants at division points of the railroads or at some town near their destinations, they were usually accommodated at reception, receiving, or immigrant houses, where they were given information,

³³ See circulars and sample contract in *Great Northern Scrapbook*, p. 68, 70, 77.

³⁴ Circular letter in "Foreign Agents," vol. 3; Holloway to Hibbard, May 15, 1873, in "Foreign Emigration."

food, and clothing, if necessary, and where they could remain while searching for farms. The first division of the St. Paul and Pacific erected such houses on its main line at Litchfield, Benson, Morris, Willmar, and Breckenridge. Most of these were constructed in and before 1872. The Northern Pacific erected reception houses at Duluth, Brainerd, and Glyndon in 1872. The largest of these, which was capable of accommodating a hundred individuals, was located at Duluth. The Lake Superior and Mississippi had an immigrant house at Duluth, and several others on its line at points between that city and St. Paul. None of the roads, of course, charged for services rendered. There was the usual problem of keeping the places free from vermin and dirt, but for the most part they served their purpose well, as their continued use indicates.³⁵

In some cases, the railroads endeavored to keep settlement progressing along the routes of their lines by laying out town sites and then sponsoring the towns until they were able to help themselves. Business and residence lots were platted, sites for factories and mills were reserved, wide streets were laid out, parks were planned, and trees were planted. This was done by the St. Paul and Pacific at Litchfield, Willmar, De Graff, Gorton,¹ and Campbell. Some of the contracts for the sale of town lots contained a clause providing that "it is mutually understood and agreed, that in the deed conveying these premises as herein provided, conditions shall be inserted forever prohibiting the sale thereon of intoxicating liquors as a beverage." The St. Paul and Sioux City pursued a policy of platting towns

³⁵ *Saint Paul Press*, May 17, 1872; *Brainerd Tribune*, May 4, 1872; *Guide to the Lands of the First Division of the St. Paul and Pacific*, 21, 25, 27, 29, 31; Clark, *Lands for Emigrants*, 10; Hibbard to Shepard, January 8, 1873, in "Foreign Agents," vol. 5; Wright to Dudley, June 13, 1872; Luke Marvin to Hibbard, June 20, 1873, in "Minnesota Agents," vol. 2; W. L. Banning to Dr. Thomas Foster, May 27, 1869, in *Duluth Minnesotian*, June 5, 1869.

and aiding their progress similar to that of the St. Paul and Pacific.³⁶

The Northern Pacific and the St. Paul and Duluth agreed to purchase all wood cut by settlers who took timber lands. These roads, as well as the St. Paul and Pacific and some of the other lines, sold firewood and cut lumber at cost at their stations.³⁷ Some of the new towns were well furnished with trees, but others were not so fortunate, and here, again, was an opportunity for the railroads to give assistance. George L. Becker of the St. Paul and Pacific pursued a definite policy after 1873 of cultivating thousands of acres of forest trees. He hoped thereby to prevent a recurrence of disasters such as accompanied the severe blizzard of January, 1873, which had caused much loss of life, as well as the blocking of much of the line of the St. Paul and Pacific. It was estimated that five hundred thousand young trees had been planted along the deep cuts of the line of the road by 1879. The St. Paul and Sioux City line tried to encourage the planting and cultivation of trees by transporting young trees, cuttings, and tree seeds free of charge for ten years after 1871. The Northern Pacific inaugurated a system of nurseries of forest and other trees along the line of the road.³⁸

When grasshoppers destroyed Minnesota crops in 1873 and the years following, the railroads aided the harried farmers who were endeavoring to start grain farms. Vari-

³⁶ *Guide to the Lands of the First Division of the St. Paul and Pacific*, 21-31; contract for sale of a town site, in *Great Northern Scrapbook*, p. 25; Judson W. Bishop, "History of the St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad, 1864-1881," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 405.

³⁷ Wright to Billings, June 19, 1872, in "Minnesota Agents," vol. 2; Harris to Jacobson, December 3, 1879, in *Commissioner of Statistics, Reports, 1879*, p. 211; *Guide to the Lands of the First Division of the St. Paul and Pacific*, 12.

³⁸ L. B. Hodges to Jacobson, December 26, 1878, in *Commissioner of Statistics, Reports, 1878*, p. 50; Tenney Land Company to Billings, June 18, 1872, in "Red River Colony"; Bishop, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 407; Hibbard, *Bureau of Immigration for Soldiers and Sailors*, inside front cover.

ous schemes were devised to rid the infested southwestern part of the state from the effects of the plague, and although little actual help could be given, at least an effort was made to help. The St. Paul and Sioux City was a leader in this type of assistance to the settlers, for its territory was harassed like that of no other road. The St. Paul and Pacific, too, aided the settlers along its lines.³⁹ In many cases the railroads and the state cooperated to aid and protect those who were trying to build up and make use of Minnesota's natural resources. The state legislature was especially active in endeavoring to secure the help of the federal government to combat the grasshopper scourge and settle preëmption claims.⁴⁰

During the twenty years between 1860 and 1880, the population of Minnesota more than quadrupled, the number in the former year being 172,023 and in the latter, 780,773. This rapid growth enabled the state to rise from thirtieth place in the United States, rated according to magnitude of population, to twenty-sixth place. The density of the population increased from 2.2 persons to the square mile to 9.8.⁴¹ At the beginning of the twenty-year period there were no railroad lines within the boundaries of the state, but during the period 3,099 miles were constructed. In 1865 there were 1,090 people in the state for each mile of railroad, whereas by 1880 there were but 250. This rapid rate of growth far exceeded that of the nation at large in the same period. In the decade before 1860, without the assistance of railroads within the state, there had been an average yearly increase of 16,594 in Minnesota's

³⁹ Folwell, *Minnesota*, 3:93-111; Bishop, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10:407-411. Mr. Fisher recalls that the St. Paul and Pacific hauled free of charge a tar substance that was devised to fight the grasshoppers.

⁴⁰ For examples of such requests for aid, see 42 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 2 (serial 1467); 43 Congress, 1 session, *House Documents*, no. 115 (serial 1618); 44 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Documents*, nos. 61, 69 (serial 1665).

⁴¹ United States Census, 1880, *Compendium*, 4, 7.

population. During the next ten years, however, when more than a thousand miles of railroad were constructed, the average annual growth mounted to 26,768. That the latter figure jumped to 34,106 in the early seventies was due partially, no doubt, to the laying of over two thousand miles of track. The larger portion of the construction of the seventies took place during the latter half of the decade, when the average yearly increase of people was 36,673.

This influx of population contemporaneous with railroad construction and colonization work appears to be significant, and yet questions may arise as to the proper share to be attributed to the railroad quest in the sum total of causes affecting settlement. Numerous factors contributed to the occupation of the state in the two decades following the attainment of statehood—the competition of the middle-western states, a desire for wheat-growing soil, the activities of land-colonizing companies, and an abundance of cheap land. It must be remembered that this was the period of the great wave of immigration, and that the westward movement made Minnesota a logical area for settlement. Thus it seems clear that, however important the railroad impetus was, a very large colonization was inevitable. Hence, though it is difficult to appraise with any exactitude the numerical consequences of the propaganda and assistance that the railroads lavished in promoting the movement, it is certain that “the rapid extension of railroads was both a cause and a consequence of this increase of people; of their distribution, their productive power, and their demands for the comforts and luxuries of other skies.”⁴²

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⁴² William W. Folwell, *Minnesota, the North Star State*, 270 (Boston, 1908). For accounts of some of the actual results of the activities of the Northern Pacific, see Hedges, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13: 316-326; and Harold F. Peterson, *ante*, 10: 127-144.



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