

KEEPING HOUSE ON THE MINNESOTA FRONTIER¹

For several decades of the nineteenth century it was considered a fortunate beginning for an enterprising citizen, and a practical necessity for a politician, to have been born in a log cabin. The significance of this attitude was not overlooked by scholars, and under the inspiration of Frederick J. Turner the rôle of the frontier in shaping the development of the United States has been the subject of extensive investigation. Little attempt has been made, however, systematically to describe and to analyze actual living conditions in pioneer homes in a fairly large area of settlement. It is chiefly in fiction and in the biographies of illustrious sons of the frontier that this aspect of American social history has been treated.

It is of considerable interest to observe the ingenuity with which the settlers, while meeting the realities of the wilderness, endeavored to reestablish the customs and institutions that had been familiar to them in the life they had forsaken when they followed the lure of the frontier. In cultural, educational, and religious spheres, in the organization of economic activity, in professional life, and in politics the pioneers were the agents for what a scholar has termed "the transit of civilization." Traditional practices were modified, however, by the character of the frontier region, by the sharp impact of new conditions and unfamiliar influences. One of the first problems that faced the settler and his wife was that of making a home comfortable and pleasant for habitation. How this problem was met in the fifties in the Minnesota region—the fron-

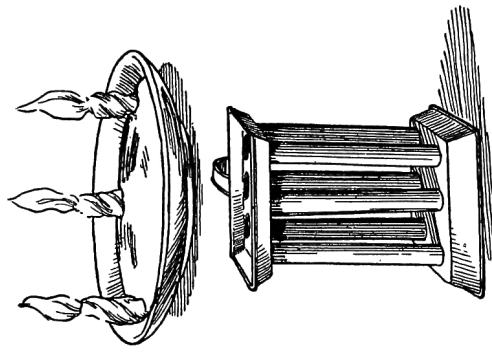
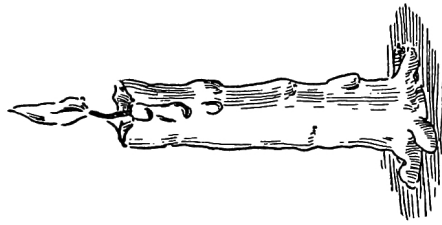
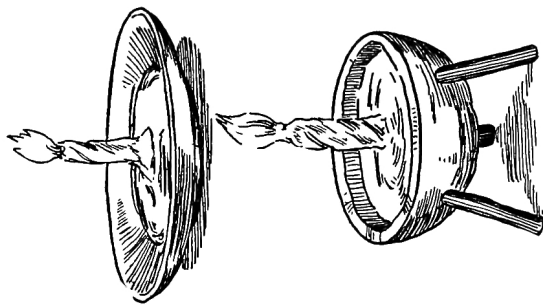
¹A chapter from a master's thesis on "Frontier Homes and Home Management" submitted at the University of Minnesota in 1933. Other chapters deal with such subjects as frontier architecture, interior decoration and furniture, and food and its preparation. *Ed.*

tier of the upper Mississippi Valley—is disclosed in a variety of contemporary and other records that illuminate the common life of the people.

Methods of lighting cabins and houses varied throughout the villages and rural districts. The flickering light from the hearth was the only illumination provided in the cabin of Edward Drew in the first year that he lived in Minnesota Territory. The next year he lived in a cabin containing a cook stove. There, because no tallow was available, he used rough lard placed in a dish with a strip of rag for a wick. The dish was put on the stove to keep the grease melted. Sometimes two or three wicks were put in a dish of melted grease to increase the lighting surface. Turnips and beets were occasionally hollowed out and used as receptacles for lard, tallow, goose grease, or venison fat. Three sticks were thrust into the beet for legs. Tallow dips were made by dipping the wick into tallow, cooling and redipping it until the desired size was obtained. These candles were made symmetrical by slight rolling while the tallow was still soft.²

Candles that were made in molds were superior to other varieties. The candlewick was twisted and doubled, the cut ends slipped through the tiny hole at the bottom of the mold, and a knot tied. A piece of wire strung through the doubled ends held the wicks in line on the top, and the tallow was poured into the molds. When the knots were cut, the candles could be lifted out of the mold by the wire at the top. Candlewick was carried by the leading stores throughout the territory. An early settler in Faribault recalled the "meanest man in town," a miser who bought up all the candlewick in stock, and then tried to exact ex-

² Hans Mattson, *Reminiscences: The Story of an Emigrant*, 54 (St. Paul, 1891); Harriet Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 39 (Des Moines, 1921); Lucy L. W. Morris, *Old Rail Fence Corners*, 99 (Austin, Minnesota, 1914). See also Edward B. Drew, "Pioneer Days in Minnesota," 122, a manuscript narrative prepared in 1899, in the Drew Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.



SAUCER AND TURNIP LIGHTS, TALLOW DIP, AND CANDLE MOLDS
[From Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 41.]

orbitant prices from the housekeepers, thereby gaining for himself the nickname of "Candlewick Brown."³

Sperm and star candles were advertised in the stock of many St. Paul stores, and by November 11, 1857, a candle manufactory was in operation in that city. Elizabeth Fuller, a St. Paul woman, lists frequently in her account book for 1857 boxes of star candles which were purchased.⁴ The headline, "In Darkness," in the *Pioneer* of March 19, 1853, carried a startling message, for the supply of candles in St. Paul stores had been exhausted. The dependence upon candles for illumination was soon removed, however, by the introduction of kerosene lamps and gas. Camphene and burning fluids were sold by the Minnesota Drug Store in St. Anthony in 1856, but these burning fluids were not as safe to use as candles. A solution was advanced in 1860:

To those who have become disgusted with star and tallow candles, (and who has not?), and are no longer willing to risk the lives of their children by using burning fluids, we would say . . . that the best article for illuminating that has ever been brought to the city . . . is kerosene.⁵

A druggist in Rochester bought five gallons of kerosene and six lamps from a Chicago agent traveling by stage to St. Paul. He sold one gallon of kerosene for \$1.40, and a marble lamp for \$1.40.⁶ The announcement of a new

³*Pioneer* (St. Paul), October 11, 1849; July 24, 1851; January 1, 1857; Seth K. Humphrey, *Following the Prairie Frontier*, 66 (Minneapolis, 1931). The newspapers used in the preparation of this article are in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴The expense book kept by Miss Fuller for her home in St. Paul in 1857 is in the Fuller Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. In her balance for 1857 she gives the total cost of lighting for that year as \$87.85. Miss Fuller purchased one and a half gallons of sperm oil for \$2.75, a ball of candlewick at ten cents, and a bunch of lampwicks at twenty-five cents. The balance, \$84.75, was used to purchase 254 pounds of candles. Star candles were less expensive than others, costing thirty or thirty-five cents a pound, while sperm candles were valued at sixty cents.

⁵*Pioneer*, November 2, 1860.

⁶J. S. Woodard, "Reminiscences to 1881," 24. The Minnesota Historical Society has a typewritten copy of this manuscript, the original of which is in the possession of H. S. Woodard of Minneapolis.

commodity in St. Paul was made by the *Pioneer* on December 15, 1859, when Messrs. Wheeler and Son of St. Anthony advertised a stock of lamps that were designed to burn an article known as coal oil or kerosene, which gave a better light than the best quality of candles or ordinary burning fluid. So many purchasers were found in private families that there was danger that a stock consisting of twenty barrels of kerosene would be exhausted before the opening of navigation.

An analysis of the comparative burning value of different kinds of lighting fluids indicated that one gallon each of sperm oil, lard oil, and whale oil burned sixty, sixty-three, and sixty-five hours respectively, while one gallon of Breckenridge coal oil burned a hundred and seventy hours. Coal oil would not explode or congeal, and a lamp with a small wick gave light equal to six sperm candles. A bill which provided for the inspection of petroleum oils for illuminating purposes was considered by the Minnesota legislature in 1865, but it did not become a law.⁷

While kerosene lamps brightened up the interiors, lanterns were devised to carry outside. Whale oil was often used in a lantern made with a glass door in one side and tin perforated with holes in the shapes of stars and diamonds on the other. A possible source of supply for oil when all the whales had been killed caused speculation among the early settlers.⁸

Gas made its first appearance in St. Paul in the business section. Greenleaf and Chappell, jewelers, installed a plant that was said to equal the expensive works of large cities. St. Paul's "Great White Way" made its official opening with a grand illumination on September 19, 1857, when street lights were put in operation. A few days later

⁷ *St. Cloud Democrat*, November 25, 1858; *House Journal*, 1865, p. 179.

⁸ Jennie Pettijohn Tyler, "Reminiscences," in Thomas Hughes, *Old Traverse des Sioux*, 133 (St. Peter, Minnesota, 1929).

the amount of gas consumed nightly was estimated at approximately ten thousand cubic feet, and the following suggestion was offered: "Bills for gas, we suppose, will be made out monthly." John P. Kennedy received employment in the following months installing equipment in houses for the use of gas. A. E. Ames's home in St. Anthony was furnished throughout with gas pipes in October of 1857. The gas company suffered serious losses during the next year, and St. Paul officials, after bickering with the city council, were forced to turn off many of the street lights to cut down expenses. Citizens were urged to dispense with candles and lighting fluids as soon as possible, and support the public utility.⁹

The problem of keeping the house warm in winter was no slight worry to the immigrant who arrived in the territory in the late summer months. According to the reports given to a visitor in St. Anthony in 1850, there was cold weather from the middle of November until May. Frost remained on the trees for six weeks at a time, although the sun might shine every day. The ordinary snowfall was from one to two and one-half feet, and it remained on the ground from the time it first fell until spring, for winter thaws were rare.¹⁰ A good supply of fuel was necessary, and the ordinary kind for a frontier community was wood. "What We Burn in St. Paul," ran a caption in the *Pioneer* of August 29, 1857. "This may seem to our readers a singular inquiry in a city so far to the Northwest that coal has not yet been discovered, and where the only other natural lignite is wood . . . but our object was to direct attention to the source of supply . . . Mr. S. J. Albright's wood yard, getting his supply from a portion of the 'Big Woods' bordering on the Minnesota River." During the

⁹ *Pioneer*, September 26, 1857; January 30, 1858; August 24, 1859; *Falls Evening News* (St. Anthony), October 2, 1857. Ames's home was the first in St. Anthony to be equipped with gas.

¹⁰ John C. Laird to Matthew J. Laird, November 12, 1850, *ante*, 12: 163.

winter, when the country roads were blocked, steamboats landed wood at the wharves.¹¹

In the home of Charles Kimball in Superior, a frame house of four rooms, two stoves—one in the kitchen and the other in the parlor—consumed about twelve cords of wood a year, according to the memory of one of the occupants. The itemized bill for wood in 1857 for the Fuller home in St. Paul amounted to \$239.75 for forty-three and three-fourths cords of wood.¹² There was some question of honesty in the measurement of a cord, and for several years it was considered advisable to have a city wood measurer in St. Paul. This office was abolished before 1859 because of the additional charge on each cord. In 1866 a law provided for an official wood inspector for the town of Faribault. His fee for certifying a load of wood was ten cents per cord.¹³ With the introduction of gas in St. Paul, the resulting by-products made possible another kind of fuel in the form of coke, which could be purchased at twenty-five cents a bushel from the St. Paul Gas Company. Peat was another natural resource which, it was hoped, would do away with wood for fuel.¹⁴

The property of Joseph S. Johnson in the middle fifties included part of what is now Loring Park and the high bluff to the south of it, taking in land on Oak Grove Street, Clifton, Groveland, and Ridgewood avenues. Here he constructed his home so that the kitchen door faced the lake. This arrangement was convenient for trips to the spring house to fetch milk and butter. The water supply in winter

¹¹ *Pioneer*, April 9, 1859.

¹² Lillian E. Stewart, *A Pioneer of Old Superior*, 196 (Boston, 1930). Elizabeth Fuller, according to her account book for 1857, paid from \$5.00 to \$6.50 per cord for wood except in July, when she purchased five cords at a mill for \$4.00 each. On several occasions, she had to pay an additional charge of \$1.50 for delivery.

¹³ *Pioneer*, November 24, 30, 1854; January 6, 1857; December 21, 1859; December 2, 1860; *Laws*, 1866, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Pioneer*, January 30, 1858; J. A. Willard, *Blue Earth County: Its Advantages to Settlers*, 7, 18 (Mankato, 1868).

was obtained by melting ice on the back of the kitchen stove. An elaborate three-story house with a spacious observatory depended even in 1860 upon a spring for its water. A spring house built on a farm near St. Paul in 1859 was of "octagon form, fifteen feet in the clear, half of which is under ground." It was surmounted by a handsome cornice. The building was considered an ornamental and useful addition to the property.¹⁵ For those who had no spring or running water near their homes, the "wheelbarrow man" made deliveries. In August of 1856, his business warranted the purchase of a two-wheeled cart by means of which he distributed spring water to the "thirsty denizens" of St. Paul.¹⁶

Well water could be obtained in the Minnesota River Valley by digging from ten to twenty-five feet. The water was either pumped or brought up with a large bucket. Lewis Harrington, in his diary for July, 1856, mentioned working on a well. He spent about a week in putting on the curbing and making the windlass. Pumps could be purchased in 1851 from F. S. Newell of St. Paul, who carried well, cistern, and house pumps of all sizes.¹⁷ A town pump erected by the citizens of St. Paul for a common supply of water became a subject of some difficulty. On March 27, 1850, the announcement appeared in the *Pioneer* that "several citizens who defrayed the expense of digging a public well and placing a pump in it, at the corner of Jackson and Third Street wish us to give notice that horses must not be watered there." The issue finally led to an ordinance of the town council imposing a penalty of five dollars for the offense of watering horses or cattle at the town pump. In the advertisement of a house that was for sale in 1852, mention was made of the fact that it was

¹⁵ A. J. Russell, *Loring Park Aspects*, 45 (Minneapolis, 1919); *Pioneer*, July 6, 1859; September 2, 1860.

¹⁶ *Pioneer*, August 21, 1856.

¹⁷ Willard, *Blue Earth County*, 7; *Pioneer*, November 27, 1851. The Harrington Diary is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

watered with a well and with a running stream. The *Pioneer* commented on October 30, 1854, that "notwithstanding the innumerable springs surrounding our city, S. McConnell in the past season has dug upwards of forty wells." A reactionary spirit in Wasioja looked upon the mechanical contrivance with suspicion: "a pump is an outrage upon the 'sparkling beverage of nature,'" he writes. "They do well enough for city people who never know what they eat or drink, but go it blind on their faith."¹⁸

Plans for a city water system in St. Paul did not materialize in the fifties, although various schemes were considered as early as 1852 for "St. Paul Hydraulics." An aqueduct covered with a stone arch and a road running over it was planned. By 1857 comes the query, "Can we have pure water in St. Paul?" Lakes Como and Phalen were reported as possible sources, both clear and pure, that any city might be proud of having in use for its citizens.¹⁹

The problem of drainage for cellars flooded with rain water was discussed in 1857 in connection with a city water plant. The water, it was argued, was insufficient for putting out fires—indirectly causing high insurance rates—and overabundant in filling up cellars. The city engineer was instructed to draw up plans for a general sewerage system. The unfortunate financial reverses of the gas company and adverse financial conditions made the actual enterprise impossible, but public-spirited individuals were busy analyzing the situation and stirring up favorable public opinion for such projects.²⁰

In getting soft water for laundry purposes, one of the first mechanical inventions used in the house became popular. This was the pump. When it was connected with the cistern, a water barrel under the eaves was no longer

¹⁸ *Pioneer*, August 22, 1850; March 11, 1852; *Minnesota Beacon* (Wasioja), August 15, 1860.

¹⁹ *Pioneer*, February 12, 1852; July 24, 1857.

²⁰ *Pioneer*, July 8, August 13, September 20, 1857; December 30, 1858.

needed. Although troughs to guide the rain water along the roof into a receptacle continued to be used, cisterns were considered a modern convenience in well-equipped houses. Dr. Ames had a cistern with a capacity of thirty barrels in each wing of his conservatory.²¹

Devices for refrigeration in rural districts were somewhat primitive, and various formulas were exchanged to preserve foods. One method of hardening butter without ice was to set the dish in a water-filled saucer, cover the saucer with an inverted flower pot, drench the pot with water, and set it in a cool place. Submerging dishes in springs was a possible measure, and the spring house or cellar for milk, butter, and water was an indispensable part of the well-equipped farm. One woman complained of having no closet or spot in the house where she could keep anything frozen, and when she received a gift of some oysters, she buried them in the snow.²²

The rivers and streams offered such a generous supply of ice that it was not difficult to store it in winter. One enterprising citizen of St. Paul made the situation easy for residents of that city by building in the winter of 1851 an ice house with a capacity of nine hundred tons. On May 27, 1852, the *Pioneer* reported that "Charles Symons brings us thick, blue ice to our very doors, every morning, cheaper than we can afford to go into our own houses after it." Business men found it practical to continue to put up their own supply. In February of 1860, William Coulter, a St. Paul butcher, laid in a store for his use the following summer, when he planned to have two carts running with the provision baskets of his customers, in each of which would be placed a quantity of ice to preserve the meats. John S. Prince was putting in a supply which it was hoped

²¹ Humphrey, *Prairie Frontier*, 70; J. Wesley Bond, *Minnesota and Its Resources*, 138 (New York, 1853); *Pioneer*, August 28, November 27, 1851; July 17, 1859.

²² Abby Fuller Abbe to Elizabeth Fuller, December 30, 1860, Fuller Papers.

would prove equal to the task of cooling all the claret punches that the public would consume in the next season.²³

An unusual harvest was reported in the year 1860, when a news item headed "Sky-Tinted Ice for the South" announced that "this is the first year that our generous ice crop has been gathered to any great extent for the southern market, notwithstanding the unequalled facilities for transportation by river clear down to the tropics. . . . Several barges are loaded . . . for St. Louis, with this blessed summer luxury, and hereafter its export will take rank among our productions." The legislature found it expedient in 1866 to pass a law prohibiting persons or companies from taking ice from the Mississippi, St. Croix, or Minnesota rivers without erecting suitable safeguards around the place from which the ice was taken.²⁴

Improvements in the mechanics of the refrigerator were described in the *Pioneer* on July 21, 1866, when J. B. Holmes offered for sale a refrigerator which had a "passage of current of fresh air through all its compartments by a simple but ingenious invention." It required only a small quantity of ice, and answered all the purposes of a cellar with none of its inconveniences.

Special techniques of housekeeping were involved in cleaning and laundry work. One of these was soap-making, an important skill of the economical housewife. Jane Grey Swisshelm objected vigorously to the boxes labelled "soap" coming from St. Louis, Cincinnati, and other places. "Where oak wood is used for fuel, and mess pork in cooking, as they are here, every family should make its own soap, until factories are started in the vicinity at least. At our house we make even our own toilet soap," she wrote.²⁵ A writer for the *Pioneer* of June 28, 1849,

²³ *Pioneer*, February 14, 1860.

²⁴ *Pioneer*, March 28, 1860; *Laws*, 1866, p. 73.

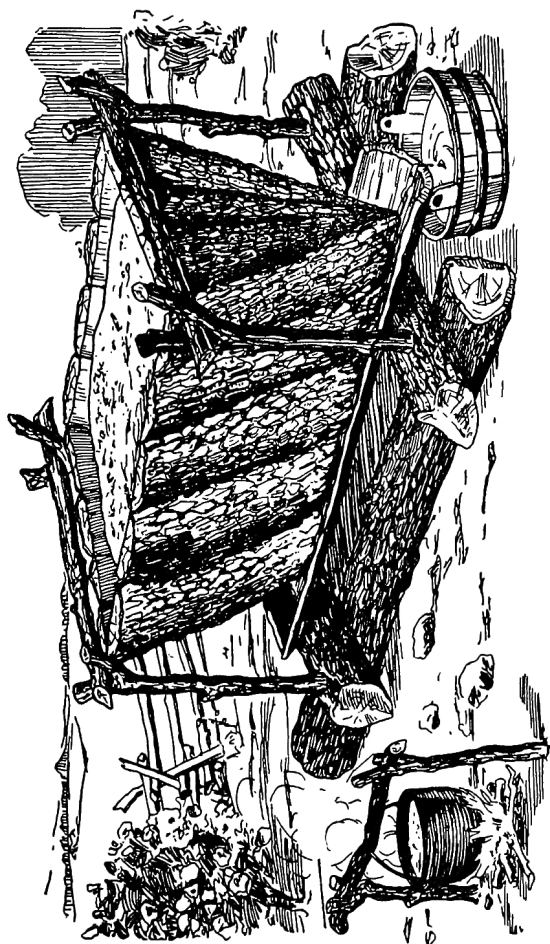
²⁵ *St. Cloud Visiter*, June 24, 1858. For concurrent opinion, see the *Pioneer*, June 3, 1852, which asserts that a tallow chandler or a soap-maker settling in St. Paul could make a fortune in three years.

assumed that every housewife knew how to make soap, but as all might not know the best way, the process was carefully described. It was recommended that the grease be cleansed by boiling in deep lye so that the refuse of bacon rinds, scraps of pork, and old bones, would sink to the bottom. Lye which was strong enough to bear an egg was to be boiled and poured into the soap barrel until all the grease was taken up. If luck was with the housewife, the soap would "come" at the end of this process, as the lye and grease would unite. Sometimes the action failed, although the lye seemed strong enough when tested. In this case, advised the writer, "put in fresh lime. The acids immediately leave the lye to unite with the lime, and the lye becomes caustic. . . . Some sorts of wood contain much acid, others little. Beech belongs to the first, and hickory to the last. Soap boilers who use ashes made of all sorts of wood indiscriminately put in a peck of quick lime to a bushel of ashes, and they never fail to get soap."

City dwellers were not without commercial aids in laundry work, however, for in 1855 washing powders were advertised which miraculously made such labor easy and pleasant. "Oh dear, 'tis such hard work to wash." "Not if using Bond & Kellogg's Washing Powder" ran one advertisement. A complaint was registered in one case by "Soap and Water," who protested that they were beaten out of the tub by a compound of iniquity that imparted whiteness with a fatal facility, but in equal ratio effected destruction.²⁶

In some families brooms were made of splints and manufactured at home. The raising of broom corn was encouraged, and the manufacture of brooms was considered hopefully as the beginning of industrial development in the Northwest. Samuel Clotworthy brought to St. Paul in 1855 some brooms that he had made of corn grown in Minnesota. In the early sixties a Faribault man manufac-

²⁶ *Pioneer*, March 13, 1850; November 17, 1855.



A SOAP VAT

[From Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 182.]

tured about three thousand brooms, all of which were sold in Minnesota.²⁷

Goose plucking was an activity that afforded lively exercise. A settler in Newcastle, Iowa, described this procedure. A goose hatched early in the spring was relieved of its feathers four times during the season, she declared, and if half a pound of feathers from each goose was gathered in the four scrimmages, the process was deemed a success. The fine soft feathers were used for pillow and mattress ticks, while the long ones were twisted into feather dusters.²⁸

The construction of fences around the dwelling place was a task common to both city and rural dwellers. Alice Mendenhall George said that her father was busy after he built their cabin putting up a fence which was seven rails high. A picture of a log cabin that was built in Douglas County in 1867 shows a little fence around the lonely structure, and views of St. Paul in 1857 and 1867 reveal inclosures around the property of city dwellings. Lack of fences was a sign of indolence to Mrs. Swisshelm, and after a sojourn in Wasioja, she reported it "like Owatonna, only more so—not a fence worth the name, no trees, no shrubbery, no garden—I did not see one man, woman, or child doing anything to make their home look like places to live in." In Mantorville, on the other hand, she was favorably impressed by the home of Zeno B. Page, a roomy, airy house built on the best Pennsylvania plan, surrounded by substantial fences. St. Cloud itself was a model in this respect, for "spring fences were going up around every St. Cloud house, and smiling gardens peeped out at one." Governor Ramsey had a rail fence in which nails were used built around his property in 1851.²⁹

²⁷ Morris, *Old Rail Fence Corners*, 19, 77; *Pioneer*, January 18, 1855.

²⁸ Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 197.

²⁹ *St. Cloud Democrat*, May 27, 1858; April 12, 1860; T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota*, 276 (St. Paul, 1886).

Rail fences were sometimes laid to a height of six, eight, or ten rails. The first layer was laid zigzag on the ground, and the ends of each succeeding layer interlocked, so that alternate rails were parallel in each section of a fence. A "worm" fence had no corner stays, but a "stake" and "rider" fence had a reinforcement for the junction of each section. Two stakes were braced in a slanting position to form an "X," and the top or "rider" rail rested in the crotch and locked the structure. A man could split about a hundred rails in a day.³⁰

J. A. Willard, in explaining the advantages of Blue Earth County to settlers, described several methods of fencing that were being tried on the prairie, such as hedge and ditch and turf fences. The ditch and turf fence was made of earth dug from a ditch and formed into a wall. When the grass grew over it, it made a perfect barrier for hogs as well as cattle, he declared. Wire fencing with one board at the top was also being tried in 1868. An act of the state legislature in 1867 placed the sum of three hundred dollars at the disposal of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society to pay premiums for continuous half miles of live hedge fences. Paling fences around cabin yards were built of logs placed upright and fastened by a top and bottom rail frame. Such fences were intended to protect the occupants of a home not from the attacks of enemies but from the shots of hunters. The neat inclosures of city dwellings were a real defense in many cases, for they shielded vegetable gardens from the invasions of stray hogs and cattle.³¹

In the original clearing of the ground, settlers cut down so many trees that replanting became necessary. The *Pioneer* in 1856 urged the citizens of St. Paul to plant shade

³⁰ Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 51.

³¹ Willard, *Blue Earth County*, 18, 19; *Laws*, 1867, p. 60; Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 55; *Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul), May 20, 1851. For complaints against hogs at large in the streets of St. Paul, see the *Pioneer*, May 6, 1860.

trees. The elm was recommended. The *New Era* of Sauk Rapids announced that many citizens were beautifying their residences by setting out forest trees for shade and ornament. The editor of that paper reported on the success of an experiment in growing Kentucky blue grass in the yard around his home. The seeds had been brought from Daviss County, Kentucky. The grass in the spring of 1860 was six to eight inches high, and of a fine color.³²

In the gardens of a St. Paul nursery were dahlias, lilies, peonies, gladioli, lilacs, snowballs, and choice roses, as well as a variety of ornamental shrubs and trees, including mountain ash, balsam fir, red cedar, arbor vitæ, and Norway spruce. A complete catalog was prepared in 1855 by L. M. Ford and Company, proprietors of the Groveland Nursery. Although their first tree had been planted only four years earlier, the stock included deciduous ornamental trees, evergreen trees, ornamental shrubs, and climbing and trailing shrubs. The proprietors claimed that they possessed over a hundred varieties of roses. All the beauties of the old-fashioned flower gardens were open to the housewife, for this nursery could supply plants of clematis, spirea, geranium, delphinium, phlox, narcissus, tulip, iris, and lily. The nursery was conveniently located "near the Halfway House between St. Paul and St. Anthony, Minnesota Territory," so the public of both cities could be served. Verbena, camelia, heliotrope, pink, nasturtium, gelly-flower, jessamine, fuchsia, winter chrysanthemum, veronica, and oleander were some of the flowers cultivated by a St. Paul greenhouse in 1860.³³ Bushes and plants evidently shared a corner with more practical provisions in the cargo of steamboats on the river, so the exchange of "slips" and potted plants became widespread through the territory. Mrs. Swisshelm acknowledged a gift of lilac and damask

³² *New Era*, May 31, 1860.

³³ *Pioneer*, October 27, 1860. A copy of the Ford company's *Catalogue of Fruit and Ornamental Trees* is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

and blush rose bushes sent to her by friends in St. Anthony on the steamer "Enterprise."³⁴

"Dr. A. E. Ames, of Minneapolis, enjoys the reputation of possessing one of the finest and most expensive flower gardens in the Northwest," declared the *Pioneer* of July 17, 1859. His conservatory was composed of a central building measuring ten by twenty-four feet, and thirteen feet high, with two wings, each eighteen by twenty-two feet and six feet high. In each corner of the edifice were turrets three feet square and twelve feet high surmounted by spires. These gave the structure the effect of an Oriental mosque, and the unusual design was proclaimed very pleasing to the eye. A furnace in the central building with pipes running to the wings heated the conservatory, and water for the flowers was pumped from a cistern. The cost of construction was sixteen hundred dollars. A. M. Radcliffe was the architect and Charles Clark the builder.

The lightning rod was a form of protection considered necessary by the house-owner of the fifties. "Almost everyone has erected a lightning rod on his domicile," declared the *St. Anthony Express* on August 25, 1855. A primitive way of reckoning expenses is recounted in the story of a man who put up seven lightning rods on a livery stable in exchange for a horse. Terms as quoted in 1855 for supplying and putting up lightning rods and conductors were eight dollars per forty feet. This included a superior article, according to the advertisement, for the points were made of a silvered composition and were warranted to stand for years without tarnishing, the insulators were of glass, and the rods were square and twisted.³⁵

Some civic responsibilities of the house-owner contributed to the safety and beauty of town life. An ordinance of 1857 required the resident of each dwelling house in St. Paul to place a fire bucket outside his door ready for action

³⁴ *St. Cloud Democrat*, May 19, 1859.

³⁵ Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, 308; *Pioneer*, August 13, 1855.

in case of emergency. Frequent notices were printed to remind citizens that sidewalks must be swept clear of snow by ten o'clock on a morning following a snowstorm. Individual enterprise aided in clearing the streets of rubbish when St. Paul prepared a reception for ex-President Fillmore, Thurlow Weed, George Bancroft, and other distinguished guests in 1854. The ladies of St. Paul found it necessary at one time to repair the sidewalks so that their full skirts would not be caught or torn. Numbering the houses was proposed in 1857.³⁶

An early settler in Mankato declared that the mosquitoes were more aggressive in their hostility than wolves or Indians. Smudge pots were burned all day. Windows and doors were covered with netting and beds were draped with it at night.³⁷ Mice were a great bother in cabins and shanties, and their number did not seem to decrease with an increase in the number captured. One pioneer mother claims that if women had mounted chairs to escape, they would have occupied permanent places on top of the furniture. Edward Drew described an ingenious mouse trap which he devised in his cabin at Wabasha Prairie. He placed bait under a butter dish or bowl and by means of some strips of wood arranged a spring to release the bowl on top of the mouse. The success of this device is indicated by his report of eighty-nine victims. A cat was a priceless acquisition, according to Marshall Comstock, who felt that he had made a good bargain when he purchased one for five dollars in 1854.³⁸

³⁶ *Pioneer*, June 14, 1857; December 21, 1858; December 18, 1860; January 19, 1861.

³⁷ Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County*, 64; John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People*, 84 (Minneapolis, 1890); Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 42, 46; Morris, *Old Rail Fence Corners*, 13, 97, 130.

³⁸ Bonebright-Closz, *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa*, 45; Drew, "Pioneer Days in Minnesota," 60; Comstock, "Early Reminiscences," 16. A copy of the latter manuscript is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Dogs, however, were not in such demand. That they were an unnecessary extravagance was the verdict of the *Pioneer* on July 2, 1859. "It costs as much to keep a dog as it does to feed an individual. . . . In these weak and piping times of little work and less pay, it behooves us all to economize—to cut off every source of waste and extravagant consumption." A little boy moving into Minnesota in 1865 had been making great plans for the dog which he would have in his new home. His disappointment in the shortage of pets in the community colored the first few months of his life there until he was given a dog of his own. A pioneer woman wrote in 1853 "have puppy too called Dash after the one at home . . . pointer brown and handsome."³⁹

Servant problems did not perplex many of the pioneer mothers in rural communities. The tasks of housekeeping were distributed among members of the family and no extra expense was incurred for service. One family in Minneapolis did engage an Indian boy to assist with the housework. Hewing wood and drawing water were chores which did not appeal to his fancy, and he disappeared after a short trial. A St. Paul woman in 1853 had a nursemaid for her little boy, a German girl, "the most comical piece you ever saw . . . keeps us laughing constantly." In 1859 people who needed extra girls for housework, cooking, and needlework, or men or boys for any kind of work, could apply at an intelligence office on Third Street in St. Paul. No fees were charged for the service unless it was necessary to advertise for desirable people to fulfill requests.⁴⁰ Most pioneer housekeepers, however, relied upon their own abilities to keep their homes clean and attractive.

³⁹ P. P. Quist, "Recollections of an Immigrant of 1865," in *Swedish-American Historical Bulletin*, 4:12 (September, 1931); Mrs. Louis Blum to her parents, November 18, 1853, Cory-Forbes Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁴⁰ Russell, *Loring Park Aspects*, 51; Mrs. Blum to her parents, November 18, 1853, Cory-Forbes Papers; *Pioneer*, October 25, 1859.

The transition from the self-sufficiency of cabin life to the coöperative spirit of the town is well illustrated in simple domestic practices. The amazing progress of the decade of the fifties in techniques of housekeeping is apparent in all the activities described. The substitution of gas for candles and of refrigerators for spring houses illustrates the progressive character of the frontier.

EVADENE A. BURRIS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
MINNEAPOLIS



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