

## THE ROCK ISLAND RAILROAD EXCURSION OF 1854

The first railroad to unite the Atlantic with the Mississippi River reached Rock Island on February 22, 1854. To celebrate this event leading citizens of the country were invited by the firm of Sheffield and Farnam, contractors for the construction of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, to participate in a joint railroad and steamboat excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony. The response was so hearty and the requests for passes were so numerous that the Minnesota Packet Company was obliged to increase the number of steamboats chartered from one to five.<sup>1</sup> So lavish were the preparations that an eastern paper declared the affair "could not be rivaled by the mightiest among the potentates of Europe." The account continues:

Without bustle or noise, in a simple but grand manner, like everything resulting from the combined action of liberty and association — guests have been brought hither free of charge from different places, distant thousands of miles, invited by hosts to them unknown, simple contractors and directors of railroads and steamboats.<sup>2</sup>

John H. Kinzie was chairman of the reception committee in Chicago, where the Tremont House served as headquarters for the assembled guests. There, Millard Fillmore, a president by accident, met Samuel J. Tilden, who later failed by accident to achieve the presidency. Prominent western leaders such as Ninian Edwards, former governor of Il-

<sup>1</sup> Captain Russell Blakeley, "History of the Discovery of the Mississippi and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 393-395.

<sup>2</sup> For an extended account of the excursion of 1854, see Henry W. Farnam, *Memoir of Henry Farnam*, 69-89 (New Haven, 1889). See also *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune*, June 20, 1854; L. O. Leonard, "A Famous Rock Island Trip," in *Rock Island Magazine*, 22:9 (September, 1927). Files of the New York and Chicago newspapers cited are in the library of the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa City.

linois, and Edward Bates of Missouri, later attorney general in Lincoln's cabinet, exchanged views with notable Easterners such as John A. Dix, John A. Granger, J. C. Ten Eyck, and Elbridge Gerry. Francis P. Blair of Maryland greeted his son, Francis P. Blair, Jr., of St. Louis. New Haven and Yale University sent Professors Benjamin Silliman, A. C. Twining, Leonard Bacon, and Eleazar Thompson to match wits with Judge Joel Parker of Harvard and Professor Henry Hubbard of Dartmouth. George Bancroft, a Harvard graduate and already the national historian, accepted an invitation to make the "fashionable tour" and was repeatedly called upon to address the crowds which gathered to greet the Easterners. Catherine M. Sedgwick was one of the more notable women to make the trip.<sup>3</sup>

No profession was so ably and numerous represented as was the press. Almost every metropolitan paper of the East had sent a writer to accompany the excursion. Charles Hudson of the *Boston Atlas* and Thurlow Weed of the *Albany Evening Journal* were seasoned and nationally known editors. Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican* and Charles A. Dana of the *New York Tribune* were at the threshold of long and famous careers. Hiram Fuller of the *New York Mirror*, Epes Sargent of the *Boston Transcript*, Charles Hale of the *Boston Advertiser*, and W. C. Prime of the *New York Journal of Commerce* were other eastern reporters. The West was represented by such editors as William Schouler of the *Cincinnati Gazette* and C. Cather Flint of the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>4</sup>

Early on the morning of June 5 the excursionists assembled at the Rock Island station in Chicago. Shortly after eight o'clock two trains of nine coaches each gaily

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Tribune* (Chicago), June 1, 1854; *Daily Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), June 9, 1854; *Minnesotian* (St. Paul), June 9, 1854. Files of the Minnesota newspapers cited are in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> *Minnesotian*, June 9, 1854.

EXCURSION TICKET.

Chicago and Rock Island Rail-Road.

Mr. *William Boats* is invited

to the Celebration of the Opening of the first line of the Rail-Road Line between the Atlantic and the Mississippi.

By Railroad to the Mississippi, at Rock Island.

By Steamboat from Rock Island to the Falls of St. Anthony.

Leave Chicago on the 5th June, 1854 at 9 A. M.

Office of the CHICAGO AND ROCK ISLAND RAILROAD COMPANY.

New-York, May 20, 1854.

COMMITTEE.

J. B. Jervis,  
A. C. Flagg,  
Wm. Walcott,

Thos. C. Dutton,  
Jos. E. Shepley,  
Henry Farnham,

Isaac Cook,  
L. Andrews,  
Eben. Cook.

*Wm. Brewster*

NOT TRANSFERABLE.

*The Railroads mentioned below, have agreed to pass the guests free over their respective Roads, at any time, not exceeding six days previous to the day of excursion, going out, and fifteen days after, in returning.*

**The Guests will show this Ticket to Conductors.**

- Hudson River Railroad.
- New York Central Railroad.
- New-York and Erie Railroad—Buffalo and N. Y. City R. R.
- Great Western Railroad, Canada.
- Michigan Central Railroad, and Steamboats on Lake Erie.
- Buffalo and State Line Railroad.
- Erie and Cleveland Railroad.
- Cleveland and Toledo Railroad.
- Mich. South. and N. J. R. R., and Steamboats on Lake Erie.

A TICKET FOR THE RAILROAD EXCURSION OF 1854

[From an original in the possession of Mr. L. O. Leonard of Iowa City, Iowa.]

# RAIL-ROAD EXCURSION.

Office Chicago & Rock Island Railroad Co. }

CORN EXCHANGE BANK BUILDING,

13 William Street, New-York. }

DEAR SIR:

The object of this excursion is to afford the Stockholders and Bondholders an opportunity of visiting and inspecting their Road.

The enclosed ticket of invitation will enable our friends to assemble at Chicago at their leisure, and by any of the several routes.

The party will leave Chicago on Monday morning the 5th day of June, and reach Rock Island in time to dine in the afternoon, and embark same night. Leaving Rock Island in the morning for the Falls of St. Anthony.

Returning to Rock Island the party will be conveyed back to Chicago, on Saturday, and with the same ticket, may take their choice of routes back to New-York.

As NO TRANSFER of tickets will be RECOGNIZED by the several roads, it is particularly requested, that such tickets as are not intended to be used by the party invited, may be returned in an envelope by mail, directed to this office, before the 1st day of June, in order that the Committee may know how many to provide for.

The Excursion on the River may be made in four or five days, and the whole time from New-York and back, need not, necessarily, exceed ten or twelve days.

## COMMITTEE.

J. B. JERVIS,  
A. C. FLAGG,  
WM. WALCOTT,

THOS. C. DURANT,  
JOS. E. SHEFFIELD,  
HENRY FARNHAM,

ISAAC COOK,  
L. ANDREWS,  
EBEN. COOK,

NEW-YORK, *May 1st*, 1854.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE EXCURSION OF 1854

[From a copy in the possession of Mr. Leonard.]

decorated with flowers, flags, and streamers, and drawn by powerful locomotives, left the city with the most colorful gathering the West had ever seen. Speeches, military parades, and the industrious discharge of cannon greeted the excursionists on every hand. A free lunch was distributed at Sheffield, Illinois. Frequent stops notwithstanding, at 4:00 P. M. the trains reached Rock Island, where the "Golden Era," Captain Hiram Bersie; the "G. W. Spar-Hawk," Captain Montreville Green; the "Lady Franklin," Captain Legrand Morehouse; the "Galena," Captain D. B. Morehouse; and the "War Eagle," in command of Daniel Smith Harris, lay waiting to take the Easterners aboard.<sup>5</sup>

So large was the number of unexpected or uninvited guests that the five boats were quickly jammed, and it was necessary to charter two additional craft—the "Jenny Lind" and the "Black Hawk." But accommodations still proved insufficient. According to Dana "state-rooms had been allotted at Chicago, where the names had been registered, but many of the tickets had been lost, and very many persons had none at all. Besides there had been some errors—husbands and wives were appointed to different boats, and several young fellows were obliged to part from the fair ladies about whom they had hitherto revolved with the most laudable devotedness." The lack of berths caused fully one-third of the guests to renounce the steamboat trip and return to Chicago. Despite this fact at least twelve hundred remained aboard the boats and were served a "sumptuous feast" that was said to equal those afforded by the best hotels in the country.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 5, 6, 7, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 9, 13, 1854.

<sup>6</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 8, 9, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 13, 1854. Authorities vary as to the number of additional boats chartered by the Minnesota Packet Company, but most sources indicate that one or two were added to the original five. Dana asserts that one was added, and Flint notes the "Jenny Lind" and the "Black Warrior," probably the "Black Hawk." Miss Sedgwick recorded seven steamboats in the flotilla which left Rock Island.

After listening to brief speeches, including two by Fillmore on internal improvements and the Great West, at Rock Island and Davenport, the passengers were entertained with a brilliant display of fireworks from Fort Armstrong. Bells rang and whistles sounded as the boats, their bows wreathed with prairie flowers and evergreens, left Davenport at ten o'clock "and sailed, with music on their decks, like birds by their own song, lighted by the moon, and saluted by the gay fireworks from the Old Fort." Captain Harris led off with the "War Eagle," while the "Golden Era," with the former president aboard, brought up the rear.<sup>7</sup>

Everyone was delighted with the bright moonlight and the refreshing river breeze which greeted the boats as they puffed upstream against the powerful current. Shortly after midnight a violent thunderstorm occurred. According to one passenger:

Impenetrable darkness enshrouded us, and nothing could be seen of our fleet of seven steamers, save the lurid glare of their furnaces shining upon the agitated waves, and their red and blue lights suspended from their bows. A sudden flash of vivid lightning would illumine the entire scene for a moment, and then as suddenly would it be blotted from view. At such moments, so intense was the light, and so vivid the impression produced, that each separate leaf upon the trees on shore, each crevice in the bank, the form of each steamer, and even the countenances of those upon the guards, could be seen as plainly as if printed upon a canvas.

After a few hours the storm subsided and the weary travelers were quickly lulled to rest.<sup>8</sup>

The night was spent with varying degrees of comfort, for many of the young men were obliged to "rough it" on mattresses on the cabin floors. But none of these were heard to complain and Miss Sedgwick praised them for

<sup>7</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 7, 8, 1854; Catherine M. Sedgwick, "The Great Excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony," in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 322 (September, 1854); *Minnesotian*, June 9, 1854.

<sup>8</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1854.

their good-natured and manly attitude. Another passenger, less optimistic, declared:

Through the whole trip many gentlemen who should by all means have had comfortable places have had no opportunity to sleep, except on mattresses on the cabin floor. As these could never be laid down before midnight, and must be removed before 5 o'clock in the morning, and were never very favorable to repose, their occupants have had but from two to four hours sleep at night, while sleeping by day was even more out of the question.<sup>9</sup>

Dawn found the boats a few miles below Bellevue, whence the "War Eagle" led the fleet booming up the Fever River to Galena. A trip to the lead mines was followed by a picnic dinner in the woods. "Wines of Ohio and of France stood upon the board, sparkling Catawba the favorite, and glasses were drained to the health and prosperity of Galena and its citizens." Dana noted with regret "that total abstinence is not the rule of the Mississippi Valley, everybody feeling it to be a sort of duty to temper the limestone water of the country with a little brandy, or other equally ardent corrective."<sup>10</sup>

After leaving Galena, the boats proceeded to Dubuque, where, despite a heavy downpour, they were met by a throng of people. Fillmore, Silliman, Bancroft, Bates, Hudson, and others addressed the citizens of Dubuque. La Crosse was described by Dana as "a wooding-place on the eastern shore, with two or three frame houses." A dozen excursionists climbed a lofty cliff overlooking the embryonic settlement while the boats were "wooding up." According to Dana:

Wide prairies, marked by Indian trails, or dotted with the plowed patches of here and there a chance settler, interrupted by oak forests, or by inland ranges of lower bluffs and knolls, made up the scene, with the river, its shores and islands, for the center of the whole.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 320; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854; *Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1854.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

Frequent landings were made at the scattered settlements along the river and at points where the boats were given an opportunity to "wood up," and at such times the excursionists invariably trooped ashore. "Our light boats," notes Miss Sedgwick, "skimmed the surface of the water like birds; and, with the ease and grace of birds, they dipped down to the shore, and took up their food, their fiery throats devouring it with marvellous rapidity." The process of "wooding up" always attracted considerable attention from those passengers who were not inclined to go ashore and wander about. President Fillmore's daughter, while her steamboat was "wooding up" at Trempealeau, mounted a horse and scaled that mighty rampart. Her appearance at the summit was greeted with a salvo of steamboat whistles and the prolonged cheers of those aboard.<sup>12</sup>

Amusements aboard the boats were as varied as human ingenuity could devise. Racing was prohibited, but the boats were often lashed together and passengers enjoyed the opportunity of visiting with old friends and making new ones. Promenading on deck and allowing the ever changing landscape on shore to "daguerreotype new pictures on the mind" formed the principal pastime for most of the travelers. When the boats were lashed together "dancing in one cabin would draw together the dancers or a *conversazione* in another, the listeners and talkers." Slavery probably was the chief topic of conversation, for the Kansas-Nebraska bill had just been passed and abolitionists were deeply aroused by the Boston slave case as a result of which a Negro named Burns had been sent back into slavery. The closing of stores in Boston, the hanging of effigies, the tolling of bells, the festooning of buildings in black, and the floating of the flag with the Union down were events that

<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 323; Fred A. Bill, "When Rock Island Road Reached River, The Famous Excursion Train of 1854," in *Burlington [Iowa] Post*, September 23, 1922; James K. Paulding, "The Mississippi," in *Graham's American Monthly Magazine*, 22: 219 (April, 1843).

doubtless made the Boston newspapermen, Hale, Sargent, and Hudson, centers of attraction. The Austrian alliance, reciprocity or annexation in reference to Canada, and the influence of the discovery of gold in California and Australia in maintaining high prices elicited editorial comment in the *New York Tribune* of the day. Rioting of native Americans and Irishmen in Brooklyn and the wreck of the "Powhatan" with a loss of over three hundred passengers were featured news items in contemporary newspapers. The scientifically inclined probably found especially interesting such inventions as a compact and almost frictionless steam engine, Ralston's portable sawmill, a new patent for making nails, and gas for country use, which were on display at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York. The distinguished Yale scientist, Professor Silliman, had a large audience one evening, but Dana was "attracted by the gayer sounds from another boat" and was unable to report Silliman's speech to the readers of his paper.<sup>13</sup>

When Lake Pepin was reached at eleven o'clock on Wednesday night, four boats were lashed together and they proceeded upstream shooting brilliant shafts of light that streamed and danced on the waters and shores of the lake. The remainder of the night was spent in "dancing, music, flirtations, *et cetera*."<sup>14</sup> Then as now there were romantic souls who found their greatest joy on the upper deck of a steamboat with only the moon to disturb a tryst.

A mock trial was held in the cabin of the "G. W. Spar-Hawk" one rainy and disagreeable evening. Schouler of the Cincinnati *Gazette* was tried for assault and battery on the person of Dr. Kennedy. The prisoner pleaded not guilty and Moses Kimball of Boston was selected to defend him. Prime of the *New York Journal of Commerce* acted

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4:323; *New York Tribune*, June 6, 20, 1854.

<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4:323; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854; *Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1854.

as prosecutor. Both Kimball and Prime appeared before the court heavily armed with dueling pistols and bowie knives. The closing speech of Kimball lasted three-quarters of an hour and was listened to with profound attention. Both attorneys attempted to bribe the jury, but happily evidence was produced to show that the plaintiff had been injured when a berth broke down while both he and the defendant were asleep. The case was promptly dismissed.<sup>15</sup>

The appearance of the fleet when it rounded the bend below St. Paul was described in the *Minnesotian* of St. Paul as "grand beyond precedent." The steamboats approached in order as regularly as an armed squadron taking its position in line of battle.

Two full bands of music were on board, both of which struck up lively airs as the boats neared the landing. This, with the rays of the bright June sun which broke forth in all his glory after three days' storm; the animation of the company on board the boats, and the enthusiasm of the assembled hundreds on shore and on the decks of the Admiral, then lying at the landing, produced a scene of excitement which St. Paul has never before witnessed, and perhaps will not again for many years.<sup>16</sup>

Although little more than six years old, St. Paul boasted six thousand inhabitants and made a fine appearance from the decks of the approaching vessels. According to Dana:

There are brick dwellings and stone warehouses, a brick capitol with stout, white pillars, a county court-house, a jail, several churches, a market, school-houses, a billiard-room, a ten-pin alley, dry goods' stores, groceries, confectioners and ice-creamers, a numerous array of those establishments to which the Maine law is especially hostile, and a glorious, boundless country behind.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after the excursionists arrived they were bundled into every conceivable class and variety of vehicle and trundled away at various rates of speed to the Falls of St. Anthony. Three prominent New York editors were seen

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

<sup>16</sup> *Minnesotian*, June 9, 1854.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

perched precariously upon a one-horse water cart. The editor of the *Galena Jeffersonian* declared:

The "March to Finley" was nothing compared to our motley cavalcade. Here was a Governor bestride a sorry Rozinante of which even the Great Don would have been ashamed; here an U. S. Senator, acting the part of footman, stood bolt upright in the baggage boot of a coach, holding on by the iron rail surrounding the top; here the historian of which the country is justly proud, squatted on his haunches on the top of a crazy van, unmindful of everything but himself, his book, his hat and spectacles; there a hot house flower, nursed in some eastern conservatory, so delicate and fragile that a falling leaf might crush it, but a beautiful specimen of the feminine gender, withal, would be seated over the hind axle of a lumber wagon, supported on either side by opera glass exquisites, who only wondered "why the hell the people in this country didn't send to New York for better carriages."<sup>18</sup>

After viewing the Falls of St. Anthony, the Easterners visited Lake Calhoun, Minnehaha Falls, and Fort Snelling. In the evening a reception was held in the Capitol, where Henry H. Sibley welcomed the visitors. Fillmore thanked the citizens of St. Paul for their cordial reception and pointed out the significance of the city as a central point on one of the routes leading from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Bancroft responded on behalf of the railroad directors and bade Minnesota become "the North Star of the Union, shining forever in unquenchable luster." At eleven o'clock the tired tourists returned to the landing, where the boats lay illuminated and with steam hissing from their boilers. Shortly after midnight the fleet cast off from St. Paul, whose hills and lighted windows disappeared as the boats rounded Dayton's Bluff.<sup>19</sup>

While speeding downstream in their sleek craft at the rate of ten miles an hour, the passengers found time passing all too fast. In addition to the usual dances, lectures, and musical entertainments in the cabins, meetings were called

<sup>18</sup> *Galena Jeffersonian*, quoted in *Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1854; *Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1854.

<sup>19</sup> *Minnesotian*, June 9, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

for the purpose of drawing up resolutions of thanks to the railroad directors and steamboat captains. Not only were many toasts drunk to the directors, captains, and boats, but generous contributions were made for the presentation of loving cups and gold plate to the officers. Fillmore presided over a meeting on the "Golden Era," where three hundred dollars were raised to purchase a silver pitcher for Captain Bersie.<sup>20</sup> According to the *Chicago Tribune* of June 16, 1854, the pitcher bore the following inscription:

Presented to HIRAM BERSIE, Master of the Golden Era, By the Passengers of that Steamer, on their Excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony, while guests of the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad Company, as a slight testimonial of their respect and their grateful appreciation of his urbanity, vigilance, and professional abilities, June, 1854.

A cup of solid gold, beautifully engraved, was awarded to Henry W. Farnam, then a well-behaved baby in his mother's arms, who many years later became professor of economics in Yale University. John A. Rockwell of Norwich, Connecticut, made the address of presentation, and Professor A. C. Twining responded for the six-months-old infant as follows:

I, Henry W. Farnam, being young in years, and wholly unaccustomed to public speaking, feel incompetent to discharge in suitable terms the duty imposed upon me on this interesting occasion. When I came on board this boat, it was farthest from my expectation to make a speech. "Man wants but little here below," and babies still less. All my wants may be confined within this little cup which you propose to give me. Its contents are a baby's world—his universe. "Heaven and earth and ocean plundered of their sweets" may be compressed within the golden rim of this little measure. Some babies might cry for joy over my good fortune, but I am as unused to crying as to public speaking. I give you my best smile of thanks for your kindness, while I rely upon my interpreter for a further and more mature expression of the grateful emotion of my joyful little heart.<sup>21</sup>

Resolutions gave unstinted praise to the lesser officers

<sup>20</sup> *Minnesota Pioneer*, June 10, 19, 30, 1854; *Daily Tribune*, June 13, 16, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

<sup>21</sup> Farnam, *Memoir of Henry Farnam*, 88.

and the crews for their efforts to make the travelers comfortable and happy. Miss Sedgwick was delighted with the courtesy of Captain Morehouse and the "civil lads" aboard the "Lady Franklin" who performed their work as if it was "a dainty task, to be done daintily." Nor did Dana forget Captain Bersie and Clerk Dawley of the "Golden Era," whose "many civilities and attentions" were gratefully acknowledged in the *New York Tribune*.<sup>22</sup> The other captains probably received similar recognition from the writers who graced the decks of their boats.

The responsibility for providing varied and well-prepared meals fell upon stewards who never before had been called upon to serve such an array of notable guests. Since the floors of the cabins were covered with sleepers, it was the stewards' duty to awaken them gently and diplomatically in order that the mattresses might be removed and the tables set for breakfast by seven o'clock. No deck hand or roustabout could perform so delicate a task. Breakfast over, the cooks were given the menu for dinner. Meats and vegetables were prepared in one kitchen, while pastry and desserts were made ready in another. Fish, game, eggs, and vegetables were bought when needed at the various towns along the way. At Trempealeau, for example, two bushels of speckled trout were purchased, and the fish proved a rare treat for the excursionists. Supplies of fresh meat—for example, a dozen lambs or pigs—were picked up from time to time. James F. Babcock of the New Haven *Palladium* gave the following description of meals aboard the "Golden Era":

We have had oysters and lobsters daily, though two thousand miles from the sea. These, of course, were brought in sealed cans. Hens, turkeys, and ducks have given their last squeak every morning. Two cows on the lower deck furnish us with fresh milk twice a day. Beets are cooked, and every variety of stuff, and the dessert consists of all

<sup>22</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 323; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

kinds of fruits, nuts, cakes, confection ices, and other things too numerous to mention. Such is our daily fare. Then there are meats for supper, with tea and coffee, with toast, dry and wet, cold bread, warm bread, Indian bread, biscuit, rolls, etc.<sup>23</sup>

The excursionists were never invited to visit the meat and vegetable kitchen, for the scenes enacted there might well cause a loss in appetite, but they were cordially urged to drop into the pastry and dessert kitchen at any time. The number and variety of puddings, pies, ice creams, custards, and jellies prepared there were astonishing. Miss Sedgwick declared:

Morning, noon and night a table was spread, that in most of its appointments and supplies would have done honor to our first class hotels, and its confections would not have disgraced a French artiste with all the appliances and means of a French cuisine. By what magic art such ices, jellies, cakes, and pyramids, veiled in showers of candied sugar, were compounded in that smallest of tophets, a steamer's kitchen, is a mystery yet to be solved.<sup>24</sup>

The notables who made the fashionable tour of 1854 were almost unanimous in their praise of the upper Mississippi steamboats. Only one adverse, but by no means harsh, criticism was made by an anonymous writer in the *New York Tribune*. He observed:

As the Upper Mississippi must now become a route for fashionable Summer travel, it is only proper to say that those who resort here must not yet expect to find all the conveniences and comforts which abound on our North River steamers. Everything is very plain; the staterooms are imperfectly furnished, but the berths are roomy; the table is abundant, but butter-knives and sugar-tongs are not among its luxuries. But those who know how to overlook these little deficiencies cannot hope anywhere to behold nature in such multiform loveliness and grandeur as on the waters of the Mississippi, between Rock Island and St. Paul, nor in traveling to pass a week or fortnight of more genuine and constant enjoyment.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bill, in *Burlington Post*, September 23, 1922; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854; Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 320; Farnam, *Memoir of Henry Farnam*, 86. For an interesting account of the steward's duties, see George B. Merrick, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*, 126-129 (Cleveland, 1909).

<sup>24</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 323.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

But sugar tongs or no sugar tongs, the excursion of 1854 was by far the most brilliant event of its kind that the West had ever witnessed. Millard Fillmore declared it to be one for which "history had no parallel, and such as no prince could possibly undertake." Bancroft dwelt at length on the easy and agreeable manner in which more than a thousand people had been conducted a greater distance than from New York to Liverpool. The *Chicago Tribune* described the trip as the "most magnificent excursion, in every respect, which has ever taken place in America."<sup>26</sup>

On June 23, 1854, the *New York Tribune* urged travelers to follow "in the wake of the just completed Railroad Excursion, ascend the Upper Mississippi, the grandest river of the world, flowing for a thousand miles between shores of incomparable beauty—the boundaries of States destined to wealth, population and power almost without rivals in the Union." Miss Sedgwick observed that as a result of the completion of the railroad to the Mississippi, "the fashionable tour will be in the track of our happy 'excursion party, to the Falls of St. Anthony.' The foreign traveller must go there, and the song of the bridegroom, to many a 'Lizzie Lee' will be 'Ho! for the Falls of St. Anthony.'"<sup>27</sup>

In the years that followed, hundreds of excursions were made to this garden spot of the West. Solitary travelers, tired business men and their families, private parties, various religious, political, and social organizations, made pilgrimages to this Mecca of the upper Mississippi. When the Milwaukee and La Crosse Railroad was completed to the Mississippi in 1858, a similar though less colorful party than that which constituted the excursion of 1854 was conveyed to the falls aboard the "Northern Belle," the "War Eagle," and the "Northern Light." During the campaign of 1860, William H. Seward arrived at St. Paul with

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Tribune*, June 13, 1854; *New York Tribune*, June 20, 1854.

<sup>27</sup> Sedgwick, in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 4: 322; *New York Tribune*, June 23, 1854.

Charles Francis Adams and his son, Charles Francis, Jr. Upon visiting the falls, Adams complained that the beauty of former years was in danger of being spoiled because the sawmills had drawn off so much water. In the same year the "Governor's Greys," a unit of the Iowa National Guard from Dubuque, generously supplied with fiddles and champagne baskets, made the trip upstream on the "Milwaukee" and downstream on the "Northern Belle." Four omnibuses and sixteen carriages were required to convey the "Greys" and their ladies to the falls.<sup>28</sup> Six years later, in 1866, the "Phil Sheridan" and the "Milwaukee" were but two of a score of boats which ran excursions to St. Paul and the Falls of St. Anthony. Probably no other single factor was so important in popularizing the fashionable tour with Easterners as was the grand excursion of the Rock Island Railroad in 1854.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA CITY, IOWA

<sup>28</sup> *Minnesotian*, October 12, 14, 18, 1858; *Herald* (Dubuque), July 24, 31, 1860; July 14, 17, 1866; Fred A. Bill, "William H. Seward's Visit to Minnesota in 1860," in *Burlington Post*, November 25, 1922; Theodore C. Blegen, ed., "Campaigning with Seward in 1860," *ante*, 150-171.



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