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RIVALRY for a RIVER

The Twin Cities and the Mississippi

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DURING THE LONG years Minneapolis and St. Paul have sparred across the city limits, their rivalry has been spiced by many a bitter controversy. No contention in the nineteenth century aroused more violent passions than that which developed over the utilization of the Mississippi River between the Falls of St. Anthony and Fort Snelling. This turbulent and shallow stretch of water deterred steamboats from reaching Minneapolis and in its swift descent formed a water-power site coveted by St. Paul.

Each city aspired to share in the gift nature had bestowed upon the other. Minneapolis owed its manufacturing supremacy in the Northwest to the cataract where the Mississippi dropped over a jagged limestone ledge to form the Falls of St. Anthony; but manufacturing was not enough to satisfy its metropolitan ambition. It wished to be a center for trade as well as industry, and to

realize this dream it sought to secure the same direct access to river navigation that St. Paul enjoyed.

Ironically, it was the falls that had created the barrier between Minneapolis and unimpeded navigation. Centuries before the city was founded, the falls had been located in the vicinity later overlooked by Fort Snelling. Through years of erosion they had retreated upriver, leaving behind them a trail of boulders and sand in the channel. The river was most treacherous in a two-mile passage just above Meeker Island. Here the swift waters continued a descent begun at the falls, forming rapids that frightened the most intrepid steamboat captains. Into the caldron, the cataract, still retreating, dropped an annual load of rock and sand, until the water-power companies which controlled the falls in the 1860s built a shield to prevent further erosion and hold the ledge in place.¹

Bountiful nature, while endowing Minneapolis with water power, gave the gift of navigation to St. Paul. As head of practical river transportation, St. Paul developed into a commercial city—the focal point for transshipment of goods to Minneapolis and other parts of Minnesota. But St. Paul, too,

¹ 39 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 58, p. 29 (serial 1292); Newton H. Winchell, "Recession of the Falls of St. Anthony," in Geological Society of London, *Quarterly Journal*, 34:886-900 (November, 1878). Meeker Island, which no longer exists, was located between the present Franklin Avenue bridge and the Milwaukee Railway bridge.



st. Anthony Falls as they appeared in the late 1850s

had a metropolitan dream that could not easily be satisfied. It aspired to become a great manufacturing city as well as a trade center; and it believed that this goal could be realized if it were to secure possession of the water power in the rapids below the Falls of St. Anthony.

THE FIRST PHASE in the struggle centered on navigation. Minneapolis and its sister town, St. Anthony, embarked in the 1850s on a crusade to snatch from St. Paul its position as head of river transportation. They focused their attention on two contradictory objectives: The first was a stubborn argument against facts, for they sought to prove that the river was indeed navigable almost to the falls. The second was a campaign to remove the boulders and construct locks and dams that would carry boats past the obstructions into a Minneapolis harbor.

To support their assertion that the river was indeed navigable, the towns sponsored several enterprises designed to bring steamboats to their doors. A group of St. Anthony men in 1849 joined with Stillwater citizens to form a company that would run a steamboat between the Falls of St. Anthony and the falls of the St. Croix. They planned to use a shallow-draft steamer, capable of running "any place where it is a little damp."²

The falls-to-falls steamer service seems not to have materialized, but the eager towns were just beginning the struggle. In 1850 a group of citizens offered the "Lamartine" a two-hundred-dollar premium to make the trip from St. Paul to the falls. The historic run was a gala occasion. Pleasure parties accompanied by a military band boarded the boat at St. Paul and Fort Snelling. The "Lamartine" proceeded easily to Steele's Landing, just below the falls. There the churning rapids halted its progress. When the engines could make no more headway against the powerful current, the boat was moved a few more lengths towards the falls by means of a hawser fastened to the rocky cliffs and attached to the capstan on the boat. For several moments "the beautiful little steamer was forced up the billows of the mighty cataract, where boat, bark or birch canoe had never floated before."³

An officer from Fort Snelling who was on the "Lamartine" asserted that there "is no doubt now about the head of navigation."⁴

² *Minnesota Register* (St. Paul), August 4, 1849; *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), August 9, 1849.

³ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 23, 1850 (transcript in the Minnesota Historical Society).

⁴ Captain R. W. Kirkham to John H. Stevens, May 9, 1850, Stevens Papers. This collection and all others cited in this article are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Citizens of St. Anthony and Minneapolis seemed to agree with him, for when other boats followed the "Lamartine," they prepared for an extensive commercial business. The *St. Anthony Express* of June 28, 1851, exultantly informed its readers that "the Lamartine, Wayne, Dr. Franklin No. 2 and the Nominee have all witnessed the spray of the dancing waters of our own beautiful falls," and triumphantly proclaimed that "St. Anthony is the head and foot of navigation."

Despite these victorious declarations, however, Minneapolis and St. Anthony found they had to coax steamboats into their limits. They offered bonuses and funds for insurance to captains who agreed to make the trip; they built warehouses at the foot of the swift rapids; they made agreements with captains and steamboat lines, promising them exclusive cargo rights; and they organized companies with boats dedicated to the falls trade.⁵

When traffic to the falls remained a trickle while hundreds of steamboats crowded the levees at St. Paul, some observers were inclined to blame the malevolence of the rival city. According to the *Express*, St. Paulites talked so much about the dangers of rapids and boulders that captains believed "there is danger in coming here which does not exist," and insurance companies levied an additional charge on boats coming to the falls. "St. Paul," the *Express* stated,

"has everything at stake, and when it is once settled . . . that this is the true head of navigation, the CITY(?) of St. Paul will retrograde to a modest little village, — grass will grow in the now crowded, and busy Exchange; the owls will build their nests in City Hall." St. Anthony, head of navigation as well as possessor of water power, would be both the commercial and manufacturing center of the Northwest.⁶

Witnessing the struggle of its rivals, St. Paul struck an attitude of amused tolerance. In a typical story, a St. Paul organ declared, "Our neighbors are blessed with credulity, but we fear they lack the faith that removes mountains, sand-bars and boulders; and that shoves a three foot keel up a stream that runs nine miles an hour over ledges and beds of gravel but ten inches under the surface."⁷

Despite their seemingly blind belief that the river was navigable, the towns at the falls did not really ignore the boulders. Nor did they rely altogether upon faith: their citizens in the early 1850s raised money to remove the obstructions. Typical sons of the frontier, these men began as early as 1852 to solicit assistance from the federal government to supplement the few thousands they were able to collect. In that year the *St. Anthony Express* urged the territorial delegate to introduce into Congress a bill for river improvement below the falls, and citizens placed in his hands a petition to that effect which he presented to the House. The territorial legislature forwarded memorials calling for river improvement in 1855 and 1856, and the state legislature transmitted others in 1858 and 1861.⁸

THE SECOND PHASE in the struggle to bring navigation to the falls opened in 1857, when a group of Minneapolis men headed by Bradley B. Meeker organized the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company. Chartered for fifteen years with a capital stock of two hundred thousand dollars, the company was empowered to build a lock and dam and create water power.⁹ The launching of the company

⁵ *The Intelligencer* (Bloomington, Illinois), May 4, 1853 (photostatic copy in the Minnesota Historical Society); *St. Anthony Express*, June 18, 25, July 2, 1852; July 9, 1853; December 23, 1854; July 14, 1855; *Minnesota State News* (Minneapolis), January 6, May 27, 1859; June 9, March 24, 1860; April 20, 1861; *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, March 30, April 30, 1869; "Agreement," I. F. Woodman and ninety-eight others, December 12, 1856, Stevens Papers.

⁶ *St. Anthony Express*, July 5, 1851.

⁷ *Minnesota Pioneer*, July 1, 1852.

⁸ *St. Anthony Express*, February 14, April 30, August 6, 1852; "Agreement," December 12, 1856; *Minnesota Territory, Laws*, 1855, p. 178; 1856, p. 346; *Minnesota, General Laws*, 1858, p. 367-369; 1861, p. 345-349.

⁹ *Minnesota Territory, Laws*, 1857, p. 230-234.

brought within view the partial realization of a project the *Express* had advocated two years earlier, when it proposed the construction of two locks and dams, one near Meeker Island and another at the falls, to bring navigation "into the heart of this city." The editor claimed that "The water power obtained from these dams, will pay for the construction, and the future growth of the business of the Territory is not more certain than that they will be built."¹⁰

The lure of profits from water power, however, was not strong enough to push the new company into immediate action. From 1857 to 1865 its owners fought a delaying action to extend the two-year limit the legislature had placed upon completion of the lock and dam. They succeeded in 1858 in securing an amendment to the charter extending the limit to four years, and in 1865, they obtained a further five-year extension. Later the same year the company began a campaign to secure from Congress a grant of public lands to enable it to build the lock and dam. It forwarded a memorial to Congress, and early in 1866 the Minnesota legislature sent a similar petition. The legislature requested that Congress grant the land to the state, which would then give portions to the company as work on the lock and dam progressed.¹¹

The appeal of the legislature was based upon the need for navigation improvement. It reviewed the earnest efforts made by citizens at the falls to improve the river before the panic of 1857 and the Civil War had put an end to their enterprise. "In consequence of these delays and public disasters," it stated, "navigation . . . has receded some sixteen miles, to St. Paul, where all the freight destined to these cities . . . and the vast regions north and west dependent on them for their goods and groceries, must break bulk and be carried on cars or wagons to their destination." The memorial carefully soft-pedaled the company's right to develop water power as "incidental" to the chief purpose of improving navigation. Since the "inexhaustible" water power controlled by the

Minneapolis Mill Company and the St. Anthony Falls Water Power Company at the falls was sufficient to supply demands for years to come, it argued, the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company "cannot now look to the incidental advantage of using the water as any adequate return for their labor and capital." Since the company's charter required it to lock boats and rafts free of charge, it was left without any immediate return for improving navigation on a public waterway.¹²

Meeker and his associates forwarded copies of the two memorials to Ignatius Donnelly, representative in Congress from the district which included both Minneapolis and St. Paul, and appealed to him to carry the land-grant bill through the House. The preliminary strategy, they assured him, had been excellent. Foreseeing St. Paul opposition, Minneapolis men had secured support for the memorial from St. Paul representatives in the state legislature by endorsing a request for river improvement between the capital city and St. Louis.¹³

Opposition, Meeker and his friends warned Donnelly, would come not from St. Paul interests, but from the two companies which controlled the water power at the falls. Richard Chute, one of the owners of the St. Anthony Falls Water Power Company, would be an outspoken opponent, Meeker felt, while the owners of the Minneapolis Mill Company, which possessed the water power on the west bank, would be divided. Meeker predicted that Cadwallader C. Washburn and his brother, William D., would oppose the bill, while Dorilus Morrison, who was one of the incorporators of the Mississippi River Improvement and

¹⁰ *St. Anthony Express*, June 16, 1855.

¹¹ Minnesota Territory, *Laws*, 1857, p. 233; Minnesota, *Laws*, 1858, p. 502; 1865, p. 221; Meeker to Ignatius Donnelly, January [n.d.], 1866, Donnelly Papers; 39 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 58, p. 45-50 (serial 1292).

¹² 39 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 58, p. 45.

¹³ Meeker to Donnelly, January [n.d.], 11, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

Manufacturing Company, as well as a part owner of Minneapolis Mill, would support it. He went on to point out that the influence of the Washburns would be particularly dangerous, for their brother, Elihu B. Washburne, was himself a member of Congress.¹⁴

In the early months Meeker and his associates clung to a small hope that Morrison's influence would rally the Washburns to support the bill. But the hope soon faded. On February 14 Meeker sent a strong warning to Donnelly. William D. Washburn, he reported, had attempted to get control of the company's stock; failing in this, he had thrown his strength against the bill. "Their fear is," Meeker wrote, "another water power that might result *incidentally* from our effort to get Boats to the Falls of St.

¹⁴ Meeker to Donnelly, February 1, 14, March 28, 1866, Donnelly Papers. Elihu B. Washburne, unlike his brothers, spelled his name with a final "e."

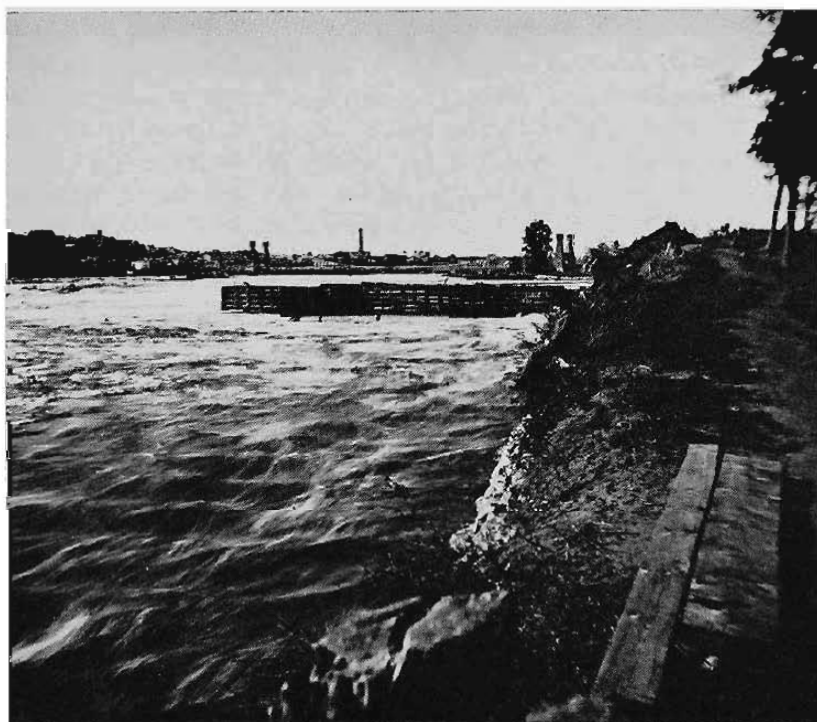
¹⁵ Meeker to Donnelly, February 1, 14, March 28, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

¹⁶ Meeker to Donnelly, March 15, 28, April 3, 21, 1866, Donnelly Papers; Donnelly to Curtis H. Pettit, February 15, 1866, Pettit Papers.

Anthony." In view of the narrow perspective the water-power companies took, he warned that Donnelly must beware of the Washburns and of the "slippery" Richard Chute.¹⁵

The opposition, Meeker believed, would employ two lines of attack to defeat the land-grant bill. One would be an attempt to discredit the company by pointing to its nine years of inactivity. For this argument Meeker had a ready answer. "For the past five years," he wrote, "we have been in war and desolation[.] the four preceding years were noted for commercial and financial disaster. Who in the West could make any considerable improvements even in matters of less undertaking?" The second stratagem, more devious than the first, Meeker termed "*Washburne through out.*" The heart of the alleged black scheme was to block the land-grant bill, push through another providing for a survey of the upper Mississippi River, and then control the investigators' report. The scheme was born in the fertile brain of Richard Chute, Meeker claimed, and the supporters of the bill "don't want it nor do we ask it."¹⁶

SWIFT water
below
the falls,
about 1870



THE WASHBURNS did not go unscathed in their program to block the improvements Minneapolis had so long desired. Ex-Governor Stephen Miller advised Donnelly on how to confound Elihu. "I am told," he wrote, "that Mr. Washburn [*sic*] of Ill. is opposed to this measure. This comes with an ill grace from that quarter, as his brothers are heavy stock holders in the Minneapolis Water P. Company. I learn that he is asking for appropriations for divers improvements in Ill and Wisconsin, and his thunder should be silenced by hostility to his pet improvements, until he consents to do justice to us." ¹⁷

Meeker accosted William D. Washburn on a Minneapolis street. In the argument which followed, he denounced him for opposing a measure of such great importance to the community because "it *might* make water-power which that interesting family of patriots could not control." Describing the incident to Donnelly, he added: "In the *Democratic* vernacular, I gave him 'Hell.'" ¹⁸

In their eagerness to keep Donnelly active in the cause, Meeker and his associates proffered tempting fruit of political support and financial reward. Donnelly, who faced a campaign for re-election in 1866, was promised the backing of men who had never before labored for him. Block the men from the water-power companies in their infamous purpose, Meeker urged in a letter dated March 29, 1866, "and you will have the support of men in your next Campaign that will take a pleasure in defeating these *sneaks*." Triumph in securing the grant, and "the *Devil in arms* could not prevent your carrying *Hennepin County*." The suggestion of financial reward was less direct. Dr. Hezekiah Fletcher, a stockholder in the company, wrote Donnelly that in accordance with their understanding, he had subscribed to twenty thousand dollars in stock, "half of which you could have at any future time." Senators Daniel S. Norton and Alexander Ramsey, and Representative William Windom, he claimed, "are situated in just the same way." Meeker, reporting to Donnelly

that would-be supporters had been importuning him for stock in exchange for "influence," stated that he was saving the stock he controlled "for those who *can* and will help the cause." Since no company records are available, it is not known whether company members rewarded any of the Congressmen with shares in the enterprise. ¹⁹

True to the cause, Donnelly sponsored the land-grant bill in the House. It was read twice, then referred to the committee on public lands. The predictions of its proponents proved accurate, however, and the measure was lost, while a provision for a river survey was passed as part of the rivers and harbors bill. Donnelly did not oppose the latter action. He was, in fact, in the forefront of the debate when it came before the House. "The importance of the work contemplated in such a survey," he declared, "cannot be overestimated. It would carry the navigation of the Mississippi river up to the foot of the great falls of St. Anthony and make continuous navigation in an almost direct line north and south from that point to the Gulf of Mexico. The head of such a mighty valley cannot be unimportant. Around it are already clustering great cities — St. Paul . . . and the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Anthony, possessed of the greatest manufacturing facilities to be found in the entire Mississippi valley; and where already the hum of woolen and cotton mills is heard, with the clatter of innumerable lumber mills. . . . It is right and just," he continued, "that the navigation of the great river should reach to the very foot of the falls and receive the cargoes of its floating palaces from the very doors of its factories." ²⁰

¹⁷ Miller to Donnelly, April 6, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

¹⁸ Meeker to Donnelly, April 16, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

¹⁹ Fletcher to Donnelly, February 2, 1866; Meeker to Donnelly, February 7, March 13, 29, April 21, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

²⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 579, 2,292; United States, *Statutes at Large*, 14:74.

WHEN GENERAL George K. Warren of the United States Army engineers organized his forces for conducting the survey, the company's advocates might well have believed their fears that the water-power interests would influence the report were well founded. Meeker had recommended that the job of conducting the actual surveys between Fort Snelling and the falls go to Gates Johnson, an engineer from St. Paul. Johnson, Meeker observed to Donnelly, knew "every foot of the River from here to St. Paul," was acceptable to the city of St. Paul "and perfectly to our company. He is qualified *eminently*. He is prepared to go right at it. He is a friend of *yours* and our enterprise." The appointment, however, went not to Johnson, but to Franklin Cook, engineer of the Minneapolis Mill Company. Cook did not mask his association when he applied to Donnelly for support in getting the appointment. He stated that he had been employed by the water-power company as engineer for several years, and he included among his references Cadwallader C. Washburn and Hilary B. Hancock, agent of the company.²¹

Meeker's fear that the report would be tailored to defeat his project proved groundless. When it was in preparation late in 1866, Meeker himself stated that the conclusions were "all that the friends of navigation to this place could wish." Cook recommended a lock and dam at Meeker Island, after the completion of which other locks would be required "to elevate boats eighty feet in order to pass into the level above the mill-dam." Only the first project was recommended for immediate action. Its

cost would be \$230,665.48, Cook estimated, but its benefits to trade, commerce, and manufacturing at the falls would be immense.²²

Cook's report removed the last obstacle to legislation, and Minnesotans lauded it. Newspapers published extracts from the report and commented on the benefits the lock and dam would bring. "Now friend Donnelly [*sic*] put your Shoulder to the wheel," Meeker wrote in a mood of jubilation, "and give us such a lift as old Hennepin gave you."²³

Both "friend" Donnelly and Senator Ramsey put their shoulders to the wheel. Under their sponsorship, Congress passed a bill in 1868 providing for a grant of two hundred thousand acres of land to the state of Minnesota. The bill included several restrictions. Not more than one section was to be chosen from any single township, and government engineers were to supervise construction of the lock and dam. If the work was not completed within two years after the legislature had accepted and disposed of the grant, the lands were to revert to the United States. The lands would also revert if before the completion of the lock and dam Congress were to appropriate money sufficient for their construction.²⁴

Minneapolis rejoiced when Congress passed the land-grant bill. "A dam and lock at Meeker's Island," stated the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* on June 7, 1868, "will be of immense importance to Minneapolis, as it will make St. Anthony Falls in reality the Head of Navigation on the Mississippi, and transfer the commercial *prestige* of this upper country from St. Paul to the 'Magnet.' It will also give us another Water Power, just below the city limits, nearly equal in volume to that at the Falls, proportionately increasing our manufacturing facilities. With our city the head of navigation on the Mississippi, and seventy-five per cent added to her already magnificent resources in point of manufacturing capacity, who will longer dispute that Minneapolis is the real 'Seat of Destiny' in the Northwest?"

²¹ Meeker to Donnelly, May 2, 1866; Cook to Donnelly, August 15, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

²² Meeker to Donnelly, December 16, 1866, Donnelly Papers; 39 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 58, p. 30, 32, 53 (serial 1292).

²³ *St. Paul Daily Press*, February 19, 1867; Meeker to Donnelly, December 16, 1866, Donnelly Papers. A month earlier, Hennepin County had given Donnelly nearly a two-to-one vote over his Democratic rival for Congress. See *St. Paul Press*, November 27, 1866.

²⁴ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 15:169.

NO ONE could question the fact that the building of the Meeker Island lock and dam would make Minneapolis the head of navigation. But, in announcing that Minneapolis would possess a new water power, the *Tribune* had ignored transactions that shifted control of the company from Minneapolis to St. Paul. If the citizens of Minneapolis were unaware of this, they had only to read the triumphant announcement in the *St. Paul Daily Dispatch* of June 6 that passage of the bill "secures to St. Paul a water power equal to St. Anthony." The water, stated the *Dispatch*, "will be conducted by canal to St. Paul. It will furnish hydraulic capacity of sufficient power to drive mills and turn spindles enough to make St. Paul one of the largest manufacturing cities on the continent."

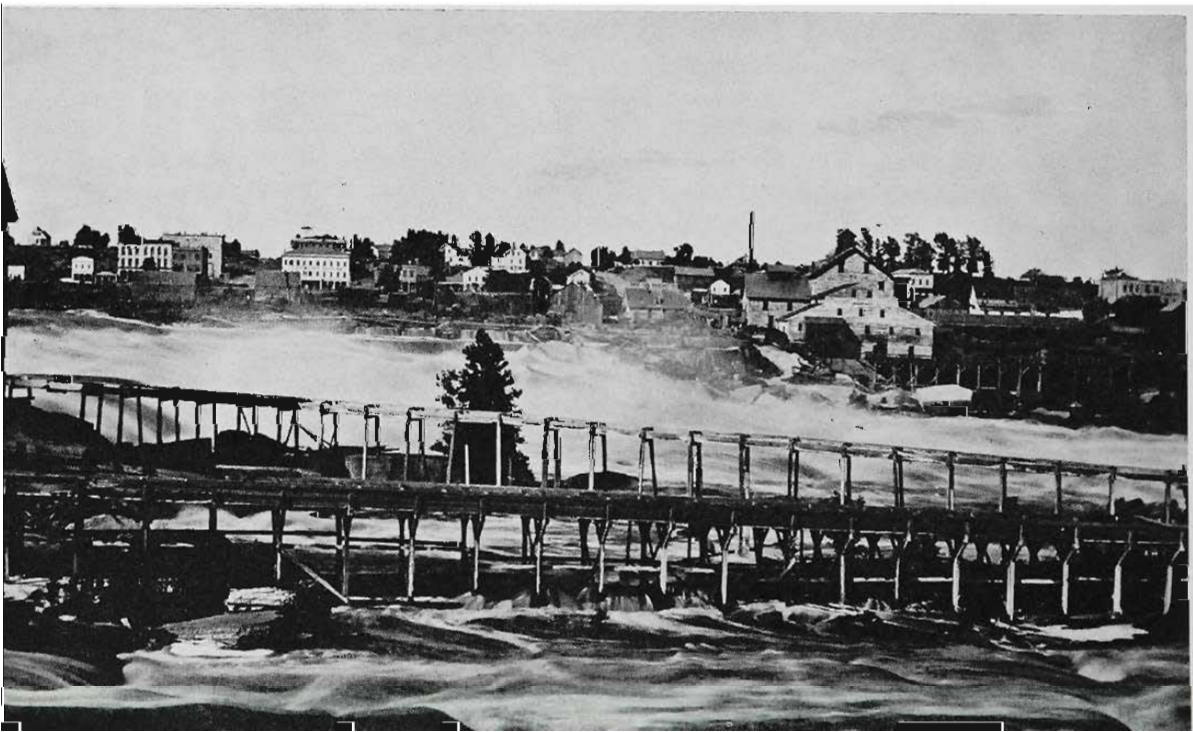
In announcing that St. Paul had secured a water power, the *Dispatch* was right, for on the great day when Congress enacted the land-grant bill, St. Paul men were in control of the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company. How did Minneapolis let slip a water power within its limits that would nourish the manufactures of a rival city? How did St. Paul execute the coup when Minneapolis had

already paid a price by supporting the memorial for down-river improvements?

Rumblings had begun early in 1866. On a visit to St. Paul, Dr. Fletcher was surprised to learn that leading citizens had become very much interested in the success of the land-grant bill then before Congress. Their "very unexpected" reasoning was that "if they can have a water power half way to St. Paul it will become a St. Paul institution." In this fertile soil, Meeker had cultivated the seeds of compromise that would gain for his bill the support of St. Paulites. Holding confidential interviews with leading businessmen, he found that they would indeed be willing to trade "a few Boats for a great Water power." The exchange was accomplished on February 7, 1867, when Meeker sold the company for twelve thousand dollars to Horace Thompson, Dominic W. Ingersoll, Russell Blakely, Henry H. Sibley, and other St. Paulites. Although he held in secret stock for himself and his friends, the company became a St. Paul firm.²⁵

²⁵ Miller to Donnelly, April 6, 1866; Fletcher to Donnelly, March 28, 1866; Meeker to Donnelly, March 27, April 21, 1866; March 1, 1867, Donnelly Papers; Hennepin County Register of Deeds, Book of Deeds, no. 14, p. 184, among the county archives in Minneapolis.

A view showing industry at the Falls of St. Anthony in 1867



After the announcement of the sale, a torrent of comment flooded the columns of St. Paul and Minneapolis newspapers. The *State Atlas* (Minneapolis and St. Anthony) declared on February 13, 1867, that the "sharp ones" who were the buyers were "blustering a good deal about the magnitude and future value of their purchase." There was nothing to prevent St. Paul capitalists from investing at the falls, said the *Atlas*, but "it looks to us like a quiet acknowledgement that if the mountain won't come to them, they must come to the mountain. When they get their 'big factories, mills, &c.' in operation, we can easily extend our city limits so as to include them within our growing city. Of course this will be acceptable to them as they will feel that they have at last, got into a city that *does* grow — at the true 'head of navigation.'"

The *Minneapolis Tribune*, on May 26, a few months after the sale, took comfort from the fact that the new owners had as yet done nothing to improve the power. "Owing to various reasons obvious to practical businessmen," stated the journal, "the earth has not yet been rent asunder and the Mississippi river invited to change her base and flow through an artificial channel, beset with over and undershoot wheels, by means of which the power is to be furnished to St. Paul to manufacture for the world. The whirl of millions of spindles and the ceaseless roar of our vast manufacturing establishments, is not yet heard. Not a wheel turns, not a spindle whirs. . . . It takes time, thought, co-operation and capital to develop this vast water power, which now flows by the feet of our city, helpless, useless, except that it does to float a few boats and furnishes cheap transportation for some lumber mills in operation at remote villages, like St. Anthony and Minneapolis."

The *Minneapolis Chronicle* betrayed a tone of annoyance in commenting that the city was not jealous of St. Paul, which was

welcome to a little water, whether obtained through "a straw, or a fifty-foot canal, or by a hose." What it did object to was the "blowing" and "blasting" of the *St. Paul Press*, whose "counting the chickens before they are hatched is rather 'hifaluten' and looks too much like a female of bad reputation boasting of her virtue."²⁶

At first St. Paul newspapers were restrained in their expressions of triumph. The *Press* maintained on February 15, 1867, that St. Paul's true interest was "to promote the development of manufactures at the falls and at all available points in her neighborhood." St. Paul citizens, in furnishing capital to develop the Meeker Island property, showed "another evidence of the generous and unselfish enterprise which has always characterized our citizens. They act upon the sound maxim that their own prosperity depends upon that of their neighbors, and that they can help themselves so effectually in no other way as by helping others."

This Olympian level was soon abandoned, however. Piqued by the belittling sneers of the Minneapolis newspapers, the *Press* unloosed its bolts. Minneapolis, of all cities, it maintained, should have an appreciation of what water power could do. The *Chronicle* had accused the *Press* of having water on the brain after the Meeker sale, but the latter observed that "The *Chronicle* has mistaken the diagnosis of our disease. Our impression is that we have a *cataract in our eye*."²⁷

And what could water power do for St. Paul? By digging a canal from the Meeker Island site to locations within the St. Paul city limits, the *Press* maintained on April 23, 1867, St. Paul would possess the very resource that made Minneapolis a great manufacturing center. And St. Paul would have even more than its neighbor, for the enterprise would engraft "one of the finest water powers in the world" upon "the actual head of navigation of one of the grandest rivers in the world."

Pre-eminent in both trade and manufactures, St. Paul would be the leading city

²⁶ *Minneapolis Chronicle*, cited in *Press*, April 30, 1867.

²⁷ *Press*, April 30, 1867.

in the Northwest, and unique among cities in the world. "We believe," stated the *Press*, "there is no instance on this continent, or on the other, where a valuable water power is associated with a great commercial centre. Manufacturing towns, based on water power, are almost universally . . . inland places, at more or less distance from those great lines of water transit, which are the indispensable bases of great commercial centres. Such water powers are very often found in the close neighborhood of commercial cities, and the manufacturing towns built up thereon, are necessarily secondary and tributary to their commercial neighbors." When the St. Paul water power is developed, the paper went on to boast, "we shall be able to compete 'with all the world and the rest of mankind.'" ²⁸

IT LOOKED in 1868 as if St. Paul had won the new water power and Minneapolis must comfort itself with the capture of navigation. But canny Minneapolitans made a bold stroke to appropriate both benefits from the Meeker Island project. The land-grant bill had passed and St. Paulites were in control of the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company; however, the provisions of the bill actually gave the land to the state of Minnesota. By legislative enactment, the state was then to pass the grant to a company that would build the lock and dam.

When Congress adopted the measure there was only one company in a position to receive the grant, but Minneapolitans quickly changed this situation. On January 25, 1869, a group of men representing the water-power firms, and manufacturing and real-estate interests in Minneapolis and St. Anthony incorporated the Mississippi River Slackwater Navigation Company. Capitalized at three hundred thousand dollars, the organization had as its purpose the improvement of navigation and creation of hydraulic power by erecting locks and dams "at or near" Meeker Island. Among

the incorporators were several men who had been among the original members of the rival group.²⁹

The first meeting of the new company, held in the rooms of the Board of Trade, was a busy one. Books were opened for stock subscriptions. In the election of officers, Dorilus Morrison was made president, Wilson P. Westfall, vice president, Edward Murphy, secretary, and Rufus J. Baldwin, treasurer. The most important business of the evening was the appointment of a special committee "to look after proper legislation in regard to the improvements at Meeker Island, and building of the lock and dam and the further disposition of the land grant for the same."³⁰

The new company, however, could not marshal enough influence to win the land grant. The legislature, in an act approved by the governor on March 6, 1869, awarded the land to the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company. The grant, made in the form of an amendment to the company's charter, stipulated that the company spend a minimum of twenty-five thousand dollars for materials and labor by February 1, 1871, and complete the work within the time limit Congress had prescribed. It provided further that in case the company failed to carry out the provisions, its rights and privileges were to be forfeited to the state. The legislature would then be free to grant them "to any company or individuals who will undertake the construction of said lock and dam."³¹

Favored by every benefit it had requested, the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company still did not start construction. In August, 1870, only a few months before the expiration of the time allowed for beginning the work, the cities at the falls became restive in face of the company's inactivity. The *Minneapolis*

²⁸ *Press*, April 23, May 2, 1867.

²⁹ Articles of Incorporation, Book B, 166, in the Secretary of State's Office, Minnesota State Capitol.

³⁰ *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 12, 1869.

³¹ *Minnesota, Laws*, 1869, p. 350-352.

Tribune, investigating the cause of the delay, found that it was attributed to the refusal of Congressman Eugene M. Wilson to sponsor legislation giving the company ten years in which to complete the work. "We think that Congressman Wilson did perfectly right in this matter," stated the *Tribune*, "and we further think that a request for a postponement of this improvement for ten years [is] a graceless and unreasonable prayer, if it is not rather to be regarded as a formal announcement, that they did not intend to carry out the will of Congress and the Legislature at all."³²

The company saved its grant by hurriedly spending twenty-six thousand dollars for labor and materials late in 1870 and early in 1871. Instead of beginning actual work on the lock and dam, however, it requested another boon from Congress. The company wanted an amendment to remove from the act the provision that not more than one section of land could be selected from any township. On December 12, 1870, Ramsey introduced into the Senate a bill which allowed the selection to be made anywhere in the state and Representative Wilson introduced the same measure into the House on the same day. The bill, lost in the 1870-71 session, was reintroduced in 1872, by Ramsey and Representative Mark Dunnell. Again it was lost.³³

THE ATTEMPT of the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company to secure the amendment catapulted the Twin Cities into a brief but bitter furor. In exchange for their support of the amendment before Congress, Minneapolitans demanded that the St. Paulites hand over

to them a controlling interest in the company, and the St. Paul owners acceded to their request. William S. King of Minneapolis, who was then a member of Congress, justified the demand by reasoning that "the act of 1868 was passed for the benefit of the community at the Falls, and with the intention of giving us facilities on the river equal to those enjoyed by St. Paul." He contended that "it was unnatural and unreasonable to make St. Paul men the custodians of such a trust, when it was well known that they would prefer to have the Mississippi run into a cave at Fort Snelling and disappear forever from sight, to having navigation brought to the Falls."³⁴

But at this point, with the control of the company again in Minneapolis hands, a curious event took place. During the months in which Congress was considering the amendment, a furious debate broke out in Minneapolis. Now that the situation was about to be made propitious for the construction of the lock and dam, it became painfully evident that some Minneapolitans did not want them. In violent debates in the rooms of the Board of Trade, businessmen assailed one another in language, that in the words of a newspaper reporter, produced a "scene." At one point, when the meeting degenerated into a riot, one of the directors of the board, "took the helm, and carried the vessel safely over the rapids."³⁵

Arguing against support for the amendment were the familiar names of water-power company owners who had fought the 1866 land-grant bill—William D. Washburn, and Richard Chute. Joining them were sawmill operators and boom company proprietors, such as William W. Eastman, John Martin, Sumner W. Farnham, James A. Lovejoy, and Joel B. Bassett. Urging passage of the amendment were stockholders in the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company, long-time proponents of river navigation, and business leaders of the city. Among them were William E. McNair, Eugene M. Wilson, William S. King, Edward Murphy, and Isaac

³² *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 10, 11, 1870.

³³ *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 31, 1872; *Congressional Globe*, 41 Congress, 3 session, p. 52, 65, 792, 838, 847, 1,884, 2,004; 42 Congress, 2 session, p. 395, 452; 42 Congress, 3 session, p. 82, 123, 702.

³⁴ *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 29, 1872; January 8, 1873.

³⁵ *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 17, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31, 1872; January 1, 7, 8, 1873.

Atwater. Dorilus Morrison, in 1872-73 as in 1866, stepped out of the ranks of the water power owners and took his stand with the advocates of the Meeker Island project.³⁶

From the confused and heated language of the debates, several arguments against the venture emerged. Water power owners at the falls feared the competition of a new site at their very doors and de-emphasis on their requests for federal funds to preserve the Falls of St. Anthony; owners of the boom below the falls opposed the plan because establishment of sawmills near Meeker Island would obligate them to keep the river open for log turning; and sawmill owners at the falls saw an end to their practice of dumping sawdust into the river. Other opponents of broader vision advanced a more valid argument. Improvement of the Mississippi River for navigation, they maintained, was an obligation of the federal government, not of a private corporation subsidized by the government. Moreover, the selection of the Meeker Island site for the lock and dam was not based upon sound engineering, as the best location for a navigation dam was near the University of Minnesota.³⁷

AFTER THE BILL introduced in the 1872-73 session of Congress was lost, the debates over the scheme diminished. Fitfully, however, like an unforgettable theme, the subject returned for consideration. In 1874, the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of carrying water from Meeker Island to St. Paul through an aqueduct. At that time (April 21, 1874) the *Minneapolis Tribune* generously conceded that Minneapolis had all the water power it could use "and St. Paul is welcome to all that she can borrow from Meeker's dam."

In 1879, when citizens in St. Paul and Minneapolis were discussing the possibility of consolidating the two cities, a St. Paul man suggested that the Meeker dam development might weld the union. He sub-

mitted that "the creation of another water power vaster than that at the falls" would draw to the area "a dense population between the two places that would cement them into one great city."³⁸

Another flurry of excitement came in 1882, when the *Minneapolis Tribune* announced on October 29 that the Mississippi River Improvement and Manufacturing Company, revived by a new group of St. Paul and Minneapolis capitalists, was ready to take hold of the project abandoned ten years before. The *Tribune* declared that since the company had not relinquished the land grant, it was still effective. The development, the capitalists predicted, would create twenty thousand horsepower, which would be used by a variety of manufacturing enterprises that would spring up in the area. They planned to begin work in the fall of 1882, and to spend half a million dollars on the project. Again, silence followed the announcement of plans for action.

In 1890 came the final move to revive the Meeker dam project—an effort that kindled anew the rivalry of the two cities for its possession. The incident was touched off by an announcement that the financier and railroad magnate, Henry Villard, had cast "his practical, money-making eye" upon the Meeker Island site. Villard, it was reported, intended to enlist the support of St. Paul and Minneapolis capitalists in developing the site for hydroelectric power to light the two cities, to propel streetcars, and to power machinery. With the prospect for the revival of the old project under the sponsorship of a powerful businessman al-

³⁶ See footnote 35 above and the following items in the Ramsey Papers: Telegram, William D. Washburn and others to Ramsey, April 20, 1872; Eugene M. Wilson to Ramsey, April 17, 25, 1872; Telegram, Richard Chute and others to Ramsey, April 24, 1872; Edward Murphy to Ramsey, May 1, 1872; Telegram, James A. Lovejoy and others to Ramsey, December 7, 1872; A. B. Barton to Ramsey, [January, 1873].

³⁷ See footnote 35 above and *St. Cloud Press*, December 12, 1872.

³⁸ *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 28, 1879.

THE government
dam below
Meeker Island



ready heavily interested in St. Paul electric utilities, the Twin Cities again took up their quarrel over which would control the power. This time Minneapolis was the aggressor, for its spokesmen demanded that in exchange for their city's support St. Paul relinquish part of the midway district that would be benefited by the power.³⁹

Minneapolis need not have wasted its energies in this last fling at St. Paul over the Meeker water power. When Villard in April, 1890, spoke to the Twin City Commercial Club about his plans for developing electric light and power in the area, he responded to pressures for comment on the Meeker power. He regretfully informed his audience that the engineer he had engaged to investigate the project had brought

to him a negative report. The power potential, the engineer found, was more nearly six thousand to seven thousand horsepower than the twenty-five thousand represented to Villard. Costs, the investigator reported, would run higher than anticipated, and at least three separate companies claimed property rights in the area. In December Villard made the announcement that he had decided definitely to abandon the scheme.⁴⁰

WHILE TALK of the Villard project was still enlivening meeting rooms in the Twin Cities, the third phase in the development of the river between Fort Snelling and the falls had already begun. The St. Anthony Falls Water Power Company, an old opponent of the Meeker dam scheme, in 1890 announced plans to erect on its property above the island a dam and powerhouse for producing hydroelectric power. Between 1895 and 1897 it built an installation whose yield of ten thousand horsepower was

³⁹ *Northwest Magazine*, 8:9 (March, 1890); 8:10 (April, 1890); *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, 29:171 (February 14, 1890).

⁴⁰ *Weekly Northwestern Miller*, 30:733 (December 19, 1890); Press Clip Book, [n.p.], Box 148, Henry Villard Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

eventually leased to the Twin City Rapid Transit Company.⁴¹

The federal government had recognized as early as 1873 its obligations for improving navigation and in that year had appropriated twenty-five thousand dollars for a lock and dam, contingent upon the release of the existing land grant. It finally took up the project in the 1890s. In its first plan, the government scheduled two locks and dams, one located near Meeker Island and the other near the mouth of Minnehaha Creek. Construction on the former installation was begun in 1899 and completed in 1906. The second was begun in the same period. In 1909, however, before the Minnehaha dam was completed, the government changed its plan. A board of engineers appointed to investigate the matter in that year decided it was advisable to have one high dam instead of two lower ones, in order to secure a deeper channel and combine water power with navigation. To carry out the plan, they converted the Minnehaha project into a high dam with a lift of thirty feet, which was opened for navigation in 1917.⁴²

The lock and dam built near Meeker

Island proved to be an embarrassment to the government—a “shocking blunder” some called it. Since over a million dollars had been spent on it and on preparations for the Minnehaha installation, it weighed heavily on the minds of the engineers responsible for the decision. Yet abandoned it was in 1912, and part of it was subsequently demolished.⁴³

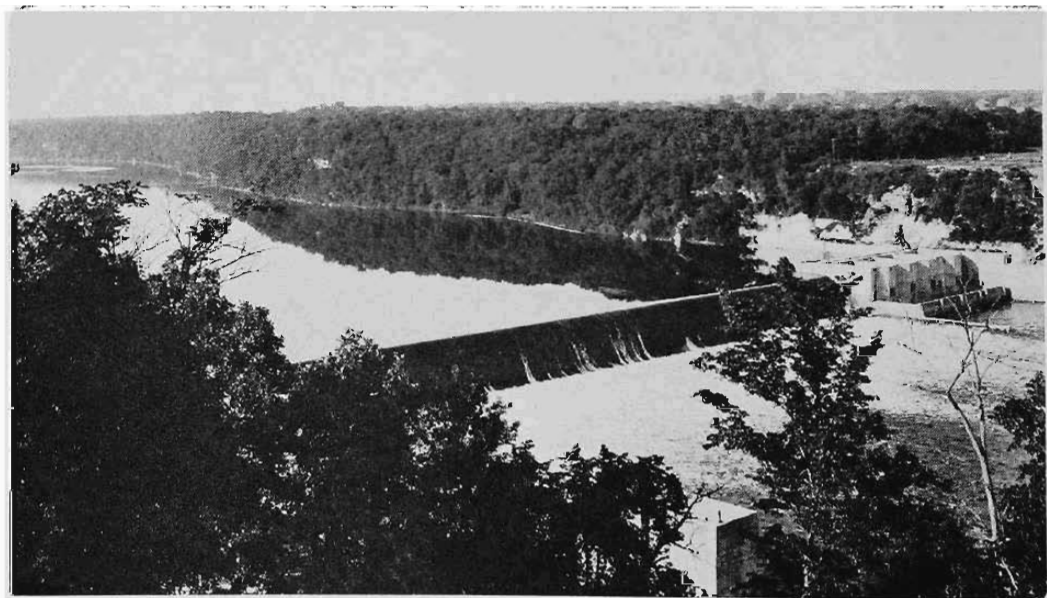
The decision to build a high dam that combined water power and navigation touched off another struggle between St. Paul and Minneapolis, but though each sporadically accused the other of plots to grab the water power, they did seem disposed to settle the question peacefully. “Let them resolve,” one editorial writer declared, “that no longer shall that gorge stretch

⁴¹ *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 9, 1890; Edward P. Burch, “The Utilization of Water Power for the Electric Railway System of Minneapolis and St. Paul,” in North-West Railway Club, *Official Proceedings*, 5:13–29 (April, 1900).

⁴² United States, *Statutes at Large*, 17:562; Chief of Engineers, *Annual Report*, 1906, vol. 1, p. 471; 1917, part 1, p. 1,139; 61 Congress, 2 session, *House Documents*, no. 741, p. 2–14 (serial 5732).

⁴³ Chief of Engineers, *Annual Report*, 1915, part 1, p. 1,030; *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 11, 1909.

THE high dam near Minnehaha Creek, shortly after its construction



between them, a melancholy example of splendid opportunities wasted by small jealousies; but that all the good shall be won from it that Providence meant when it directed the planting of two great cities on its borders."⁴⁴

For a time the cities worked closely together to win the power rights from the government for municipal use rather than allow them to fall to private companies. In 1911, they, with the University of Minnesota, incorporated the Municipal Electric Company. Its charter, however, did not enable it to issue the bonds necessary to build a power plant. St. Paul, then, through the Greater St. Paul Committee, directed its attention to obtaining the power for St. Paul and invited Henry Ford to build a plant in the city to use it. Although Minneapolis clung to the idea of joint municipal use, the government in 1923 supported St. Paul when it granted the license to Ford.⁴⁵

WITH THE COMPLETION of the high dam, navigation was carried into Minneapolis as far as the Washington Avenue bridge, where the city built a harbor. The high dam was no sooner completed, however, than Minneapolis again took up its campaign to bring navigation into the very heart of the city. The situation at the time, one advocate claimed, was "comparable to having a road stop at the edge of town." The plan for the "Upper Harbor," as the project was dubbed, included two locks between the high dam and the falls, and a

canal around the falls on the west side of the river.⁴⁶

Through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Minneapolitans devoted to the scheme bombarded Congress with requests for appropriations. There is no space within the scope of this article to detail the tortuous story — the false starts and frustrated plans, and the bitterness engendered between dissident elements within Minneapolis and between the Twin Cities. At long last, in 1950, work on the lower installation was begun. It was completed in 1956, and in 1959 the government began the upper lock at the falls, scheduled for completion in 1963.⁴⁷

When work began on the lower lock and dam, one event recalled the Meeker dam scheme, long obscured in the shades of the past. The St. Anthony Falls Water Power Company had years before built a dam for power generation only, and the early government installations had been dedicated solely to navigation. In 1958 the two purposes were combined when the company abandoned its "lower dam" to use the government dam built slightly downstream. Here was realized, after a hundred years, an installation contemplated by Bradley B. Meeker when he organized his ill-fated company to bring navigation into Minneapolis over the treacherous waters and at the same time capture power from the river rushing down from the Falls of St. Anthony.

A more ironic twist in retrospect, perhaps, is that neither Minneapolis nor St. Paul had been as dependent on the river as they once thought they were. Without water power until the 1920s, St. Paul had developed its manufactures nonetheless. And Minneapolis, deprived of navigation until the twentieth century, had acquired a wholesaling business which overshadowed that of St. Paul. Both were the commercial-industrial cities they had dreamed of becoming, and together in relative peace, they formed a double-headed metropolis supreme in the Northwest.

⁴⁴ Northern States Power Company, Scrapbook No. 1, p. 132, in the offices of the company, Minneapolis.

⁴⁵ Articles of Incorporation, Book U-3, p. 704, Secretary of State's Office; Northern States Power Company, Scrapbook No. 1, p. 185, 187.

⁴⁶ Northern States Power Company, Scrapbook No. 1, p. 219; No. 2, p. 98.

⁴⁷ "The Minneapolis Harbor," in *Greater Minneapolis*, 12:15, 30 (May, 1961); Wesley Dibbern, Corps of Engineers, to the author, August 11, 1961.

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