

Mr. Singley is a long-time resident of Minnesota. Since his retirement in 1958 he has devoted his time to a study of the territory's military roads in the 1850s.

RETRACING the MILITARY ROAD From POINT DOUGLAS to SUPERIOR

GROVER SINGLEY

THE ROAD SYSTEM of Minnesota Territory came into existence on July 18, 1850, when Congress passed the Minnesota Road Act, authorizing five "Military Roads" and providing funds for their construction.¹ These roads were intended for the protection of the frontier, and at the same time they provided access to undeveloped areas for the land-hungry settlers.

The five roads authorized by the act were: (1) the Point Douglas-St. Louis River road; (2) the Point Douglas-Fort Gaines road (later renamed the Fort Ripley road); (3) the Wabasha-Mendota road; (4) the Swan River-Long Prairie road; (5) the Mendota-Big Sioux River road. Of these the one to the St. Louis River was considered the most important for the development of the territory. Editors in St. Paul, St. Anthony, and Stillwater hammered incessantly on the theme that a good road between the head of navigation on the Mississippi and the head of navigation on the Great Lakes would make St. Paul the chief supply point for the entire

Northwest. It was the first of the routes upon which work was started.

The United States Army placed First Lieutenant James H. Simpson of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in charge of building the Minnesota roads, and in the summer and fall of 1851 Simpson's assistant, Josiah Knauer, surveyed the route from Point Douglas to the St. Louis River. He found it to be some 200 miles long.²

In one of his early reports Simpson described the road as follows: "It runs entirely on the west side of the river Saint Croix . . . keeping . . . [for about seventy-eight miles] with the exception of the portion about Cottage Grove, within a mile or two of its banks. . . . [From Sunrise River] it runs generally about northwest to Snake river, a distance of twenty-four miles, crossing it just below the mouth of Lake Pokegomah [*sic*]; thence along the east side . . . eight miles; thence in a direction generally north 30° east to Kettle river . . . forty miles; and thence in about the same general course to the falls or rapids of the Saint Louis river, a distance of about fifty miles. . . . From Point Douglass to Stillwater . . . the country is . . . prairie more or less rolling. From Stillwater to Otis, three miles beyond Marine Mills . . . it is brush

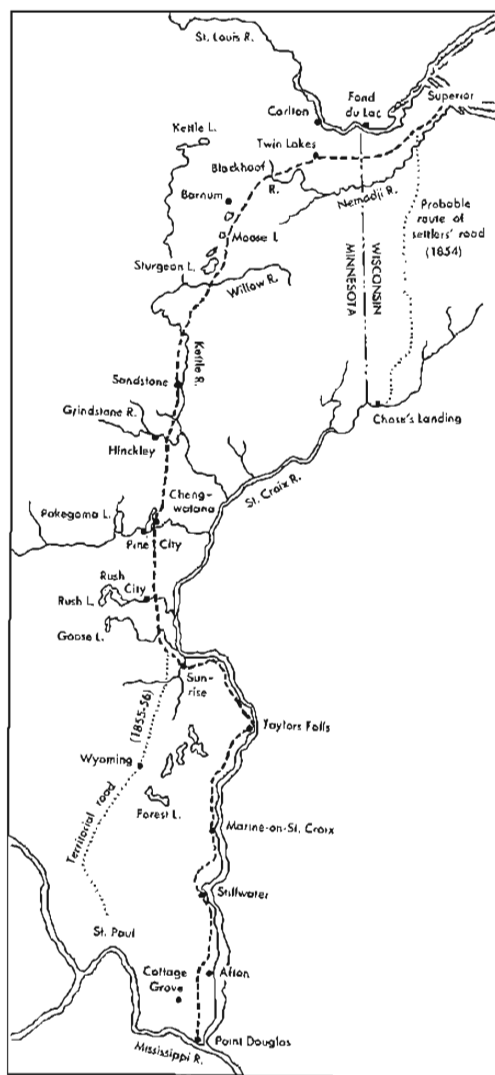
¹ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 9:439. For a complete discussion of this subject, see Arthur J. Larsen, "The Development of the Minnesota Road System," 39-88, an unpublished dissertation in the Minnesota Historical Society.

² 32 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 438-443 (serial 611).

and oak openings, with occasionally a section of prairie. From Otis to the St. Louis river, it is dense timber, the greater portion of which is traversed by extensive marshes and tamarack swamps."³

During the years of construction four major changes and a number of minor ones were made in the route, reducing its length considerably, while in July, 1854, Congress changed the northern terminal from the falls

The Point Douglas-St. Louis River road, built by the United States Corps of Topographical Engineers in the years 1851-57



of the St. Louis River to its mouth at the town of Superior, Wisconsin, thus adding about 16 miles. In 1858, when the survey and location were complete, the length of the road was reported as 178 miles, but there is reason to think that some of the improvements and cutoffs then included were never made, and the length as traveled seems to have been about 185 miles.⁴

As of June, 1966, the old military road was divided approximately as follows: Interstate Highway 35, 2 miles; Minnesota state highway system, 15 miles; county roads, 75 miles; abandoned, 93 miles. The author has traveled with his car over all of the route that is still maintained by state and county highway funds. Good luck and several exceptionally dry years permitted the use of the car over additional miles that are grown up to grass, weeds, and brush. Many more were explored on foot.

Tracking down old roads is complicated by the wandering course they took; if at any time they coincide with section lines it cannot have been intentional on the part of the engineers. Good stout clothes are a must for anyone with the urge to explore these old routes, for they lead through briars, prickly ash thickets, and poison ivy, while in summer mosquitoes, deer flies, and wood ticks are plentiful. But local history enthusiasts will understand the satisfaction that comes with seeing a faint trace of the old track leading across a pasture or down

³ 32 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 440 (serial 611).

⁴ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:306; 35 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 1193 (serial 976). In searching out the exact route followed by the military road, the author relied mainly on the original survey map, of which he obtained a photographic copy from the National Archives. See "Map of Road from Point Douglas to the Falls of the Saint Louis River," (Roads 108); "Map of Northern Extension of Road From Point Douglas to St. Louis River," (Roads 123) both in Record Group 77. (Hereafter records in the National Archives are indicated by the symbol NARG followed by the record group number.) Several inaccurate accounts of the route have been published. See, for example, George H. Primmer, "Pioneer Roads Centering at Duluth," in *Minnesota History*, 16:282-299 (September, 1935).

a stream bank in exactly the spot where the original survey indicates that it should be.

POINT DOUGLAS, the southern terminal, has, like the road itself, almost vanished.⁵ Except for some parts of foundations, all the buildings near the boat landing have disappeared. The Burlington and Milwaukee railroads have laid tracks across the water front, and U.S. Highway 10 has cut a deep ravine under the Milwaukee tracks. The starting point of the military road was at the foot of Burris Street, near Levi Hertzell's warehouse. It ran north 1,030 feet, then turned northwest for another 485 feet. Continuing in a northerly direction, it crossed sections 9, 4, and 5 of Township 26 North, Range 20 West, then went through sections 32, 28, 21, 16, 9, and 4 of T. 27 N. R. 20 W. (See map, p. 236.)

Contrary to what one might expect, this was not the first part of the road built. Before Lieutenant Simpson could get construction going on it, he received a petition originating in Stillwater and Point Douglas,

requesting that Cottage Grove be bypassed and the road run from Point Douglas to Stillwater by way of the Bolles mill near Afton.⁶ The relocation required the approval of Congress, since Cottage Grove was mentioned as a point on the road in the original act. This was remedied in 1853, when the army was authorized to build the road "by the most direct and convenient route" between the two terminals, but construction on the southernmost 19 miles was delayed until 1857. By that time Congress had lost interest in the matter, and of some \$31,000 appropriated for completion of the road in 1857, only about \$2,000 was available for this stretch. The lack of funds may account for the fact that so few traces of the old road can be found in Denmark Township.⁷

One part that may be dimly seen is hidden in a brushy fence row in the northwest quarter of section 28. Two more places are farther north, in section 16, where the old road crossed a crooked creek several times. Still farther north, in section 4, where the military road crossed a branch of Trout Brook, a shallow ravine cut down to accommodate an old road is still visible on the north bank of the creek. A few hundred feet beyond, the military route comes into a county road, which follows the old line north through sections 33 and 28 of T. 28 N. R. 20 W.

Much of the country between Point Douglas and Stillwater was settled by 1857, and some of the old farms still serve as guides to the route. One is the Simon Shingledecker place in section 8 of T. 27 N. R. 20 W.; another is the home of Thomas Persons, which was located where the military route crossed the old Afton-Cottage Grove road. A half mile farther north the government road passed the house of Joseph Haskell, who in 1839 was the first man to take up farming as a way of life on the Washington County prairie.⁸

From Haskell's place the route ran north among some low hills, then down along the west side of a deep ravine in section 16 to Valley Creek. There it turned east and followed along the creek to a high hill, turned

⁵For an account of the early settlement of Point Douglas, see William H. C. Folsom, *Fifty Years in the Northwest*, 364-366 (St. Paul, 1888). The original plat of the town is on file in the Washington County Courthouse, Stillwater.

⁶John J. Abert to Charles M. Conrad, Secretary of War, September 2, 1850; December 22, 1851, Letter Books, Topographical Engineers, NARG 77; *Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 1 session, 1174.

⁷United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:150; 11:203. Simpson employed William Payte, a civil engineer, to resurvey this 19 miles during July, 1855. As finally relocated, the line bypassed both Cottage Grove and the Bolles mill. On October 1, 1857, a contract was signed with S. W. Furber and J. W. Hamilton to build it for \$1,949.80. 34 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 471 (serial 811); map of "Relocation of the Southern Section of Point Douglas & St. Louis River Road," (Roads 134); George Thom to Abert, October 1, 1857, Letters Received, Topographical Engineers, NARG 77. Two county road surveys, dated September, 1858, and August, 1879, on file in the Washington County Courthouse, were helpful in following the exact line of the military road as relocated by Payte.

⁸Folsom, *Fifty Years in the Northwest*, 358, 367; George M. Warner and Charles M. Foote, *History of Washington County and the St. Croix Valley*, 411 (Minneapolis, 1881).

The maps here and on the following pages show the military road (broken red line) in sections of 20 miles or more, beginning at the southern end. Present roads appear in black; surveyors' lines and numbers are shown in blue. The original maps from which these were prepared were drawn by the author.

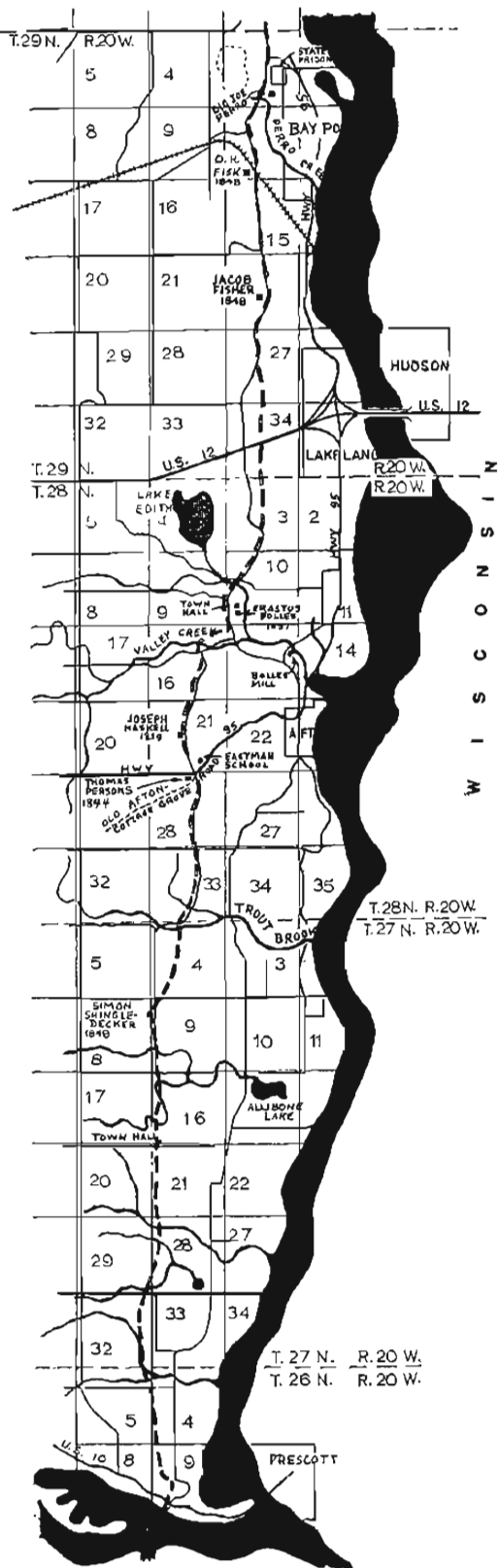
left around the foot of this hill and then went north through section 10 and into section 3 of T. 28 N. R. 20 W. on a line now followed by a county road. At about the time the military road was built, Erastus Bolles located in section 10 and set up a blacksmith shop. The old Bolles house still stands beside the road in a grove of trees south of the town hall in the community of Valley Creek.⁹

About half way across section 3 the county road makes a short bend to the west, then continues north again through sections 3, 34, and 27. The military road did not turn but went straight ahead, and the county road comes back to the old route again in section 27 of T. 29 N. R. 20 W. North of here in section 22 is another early settler's place—the Jacob Fisher farm—and a mile and a half farther on is the homestead of David H. Fisk, still to be seen among some trees just west of the railroad crossing. Soon after leaving the Fisk farm in section 10, the road ran down through a winding ravine to the home of "Big Joe" Perro (or Perreau) on the bank of Perro Creek. Big Joe was a retired river pilot whose house stood on the north bank of the stream, a short distance south of the walls of the present state prison.¹⁰ From his place the road ran up what is now Main Street of Oak Park, then along the bluffs by the St. Croix into Stillwater.

THE FIRST PROPOSALS for construction on the St. Louis River road, opened March 15, 1852, called for bids on 31 miles

⁹ Augustus B. Easton, *History of the Saint Croix Valley*, 1:370 (Chicago, 1909).

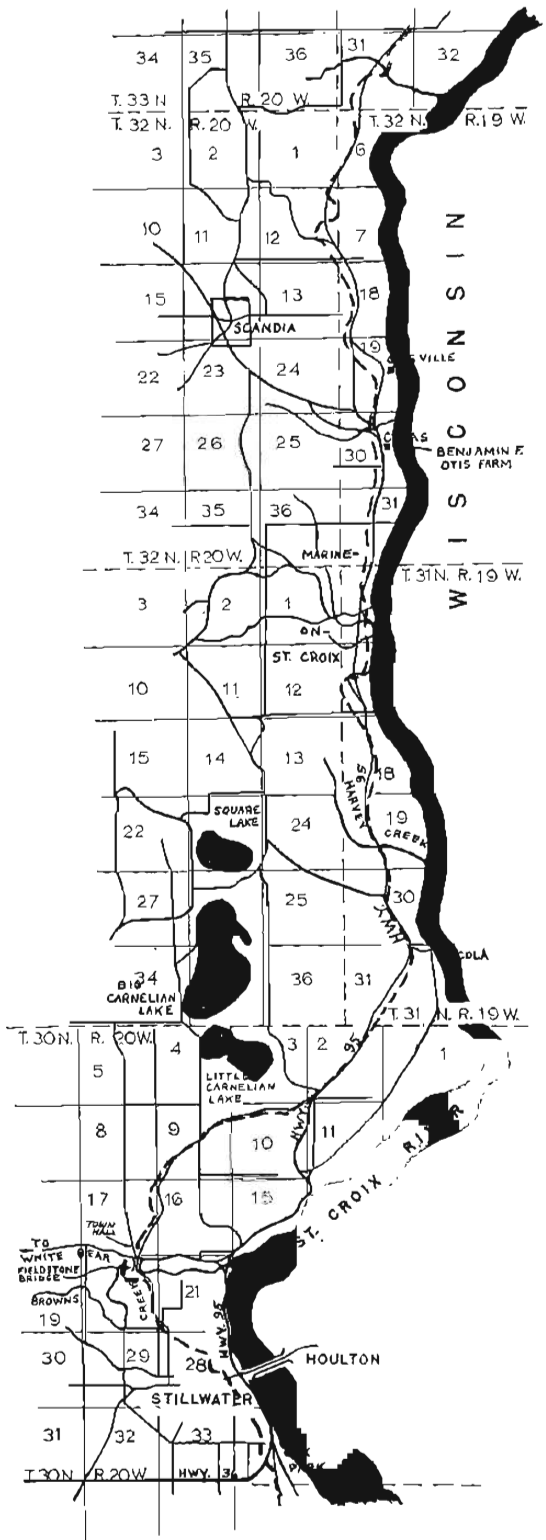
¹⁰ Folsom, *Fifty Years in the Northwest*, 80; Warner and Foote, *History of Washington County*, 425.



of road between the southwest corner of the cemetery at the top of the hill in Stillwater and milepost 56 at the falls of the St. Croix.¹¹ Almost immediately a move developed in Stillwater to change the first 8 miles of the route to run along the St. Croix and through Arcola, then a busy sawmill town some 6 miles upriver from Stillwater. Because of the difficulties of the river route, Simpson had laid out the road on the high ground farther back, and despite a local tradition that it passed through Arcola, there is good evidence that he stuck to his original plan.¹²

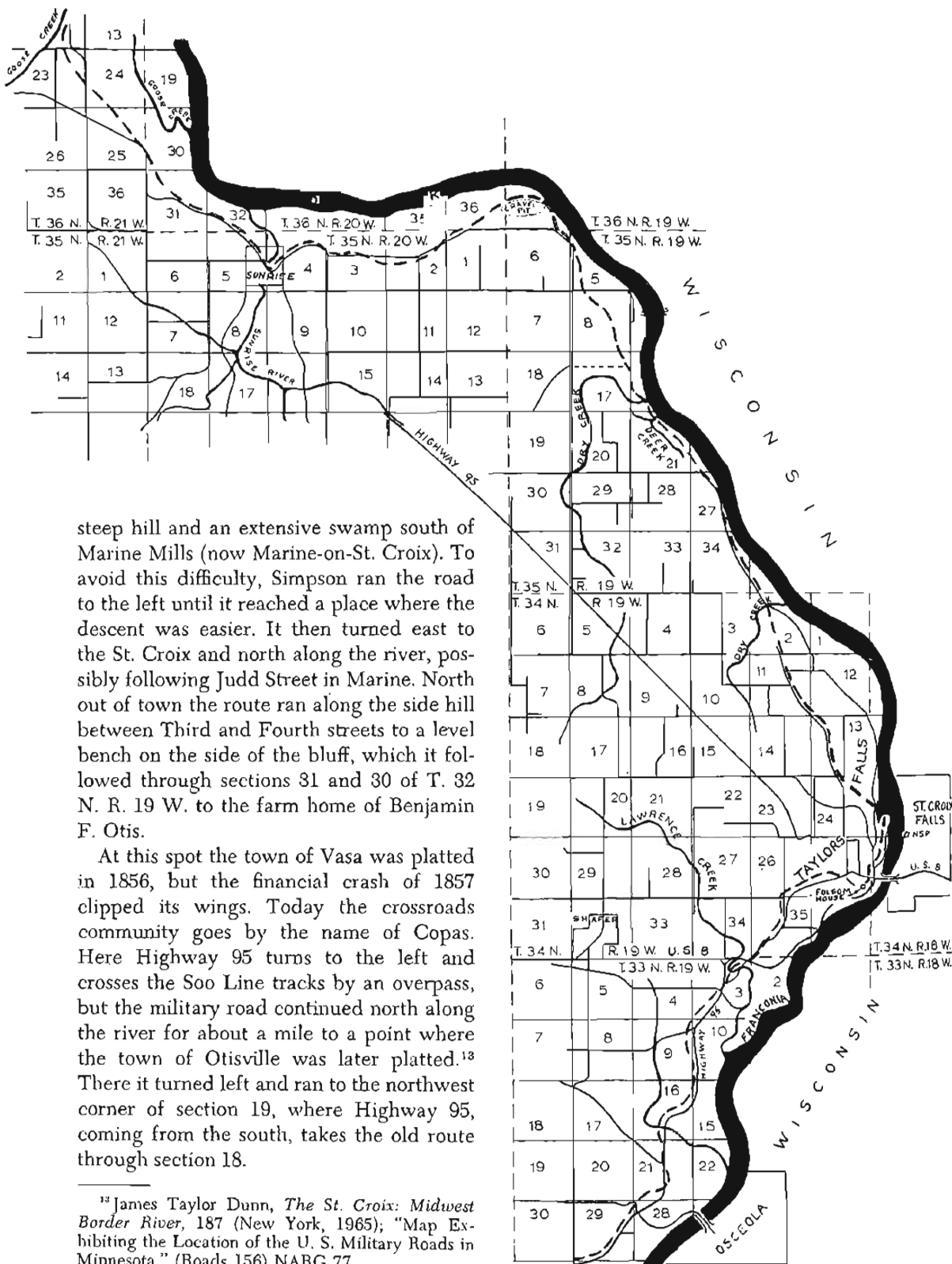
According to this, the military road ran from the southwest corner of the cemetery to a place on Browns Creek in section 20 of T. 30 N. R. 20 W. There is now a substantial bridge over Browns Creek and the railroad tracks at this point, but the depression at the south end where the military road ran down over the bank and crossed the creek on a bridge of fieldstone is easy to trace. A short way north of the creek the county road forks, the right branch following the military route north and northeast through sections 17, 9, and 10. Near the southwest corner of section 2 of T. 30 N. R. 20 W. the old road has been incorporated into State Highway 95. This now follows the old route through sections 31 and 30 of T. 31 N. R. 19 W. to Harvey Creek in section 19. (See map at right.)

From Harvey Creek the military road continued north across sections 19 and 18 to a



¹¹ *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), February 12, 1852. Until 1872-73 the Stillwater cemetery was located along the north side of Laurel Street, between Second and Fourth streets.

¹² Simpson to Abert, May 22, 1852, Letters Received, Topographical Engineers; "Map of Proposed Routes from Stillwater to Arcola," (Roads 96) NARC 77. The minutes of the Washington County commissioners for 1856 reveal that a county road was ordered built from Stillwater through Arcola "to intersect the Point Douglas & St. Louis River Road at Harvey Creek." ("Proceedings," July 7, 1856, on file in the office of the county auditor, Stillwater.) Since Harvey Creek is a mile or more beyond Arcola, such a road would not have been necessary had the military route included Arcola.



steep hill and an extensive swamp south of Marine Mills (now Marine-on-St. Croix). To avoid this difficulty, Simpson ran the road to the left until it reached a place where the descent was easier. It then turned east to the St. Croix and north along the river, possibly following Judd Street in Marine. North out of town the route ran along the side hill between Third and Fourth streets to a level bench on the side of the bluff, which it followed through sections 31 and 30 of T. 32 N. R. 19 W. to the farm home of Benjamin F. Otis.

At this spot the town of Vasa was platted in 1856, but the financial crash of 1857 clipped its wings. Today the crossroads community goes by the name of Copas. Here Highway 95 turns to the left and crosses the Soo Line tracks by an overpass, but the military road continued north along the river for about a mile to a point where the town of Otisville was later platted.¹³ There it turned left and ran to the northwest corner of section 19, where Highway 95, coming from the south, takes the old route through section 18.

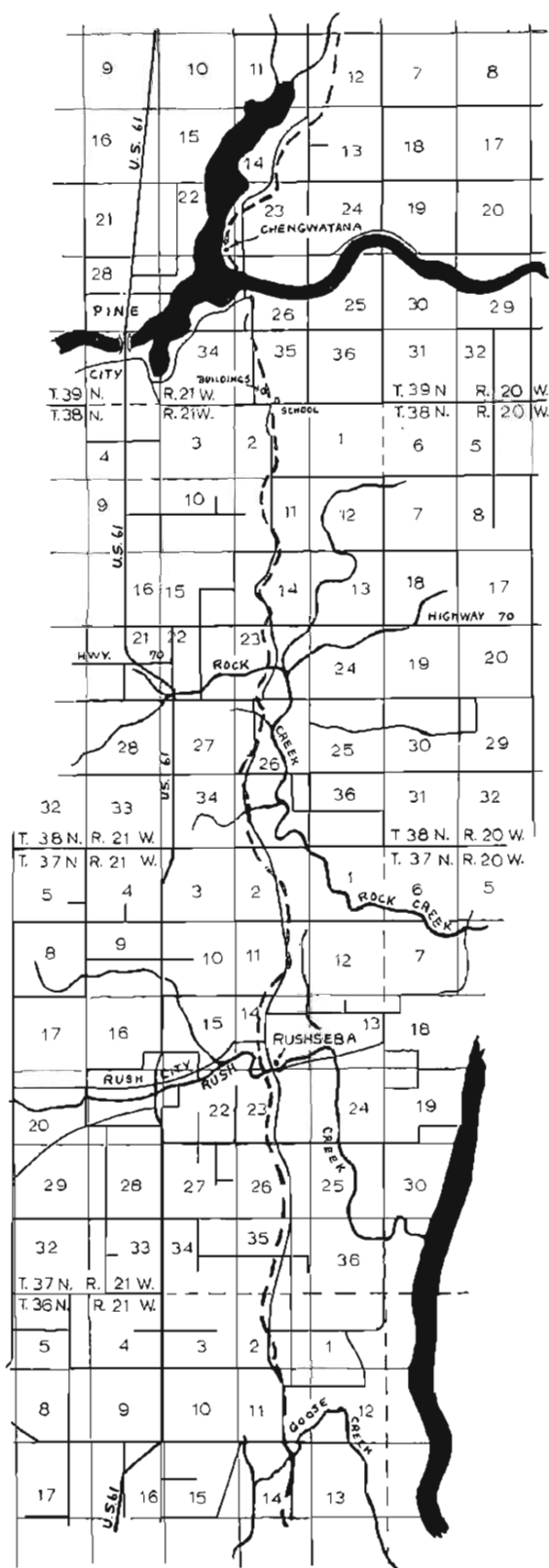
¹³ James Taylor Dunn, *The St. Croix: Midwest Border River*, 187 (New York, 1965); "Map Exhibiting the Location of the U. S. Military Roads in Minnesota," (Roads 156) NARG 77.

Sections 12 and 1 of T. 32 N. R. 20 W. and section 6 of T. 32 N. R. 19 W. are badly cut up by ravines which made the old route exceedingly crooked in places. A glance at the map for this part of the road (p. 237) will show how Highway 95 cuts across these twists and turns. With a little footwork some of the abandoned parts of the old road can still be found.

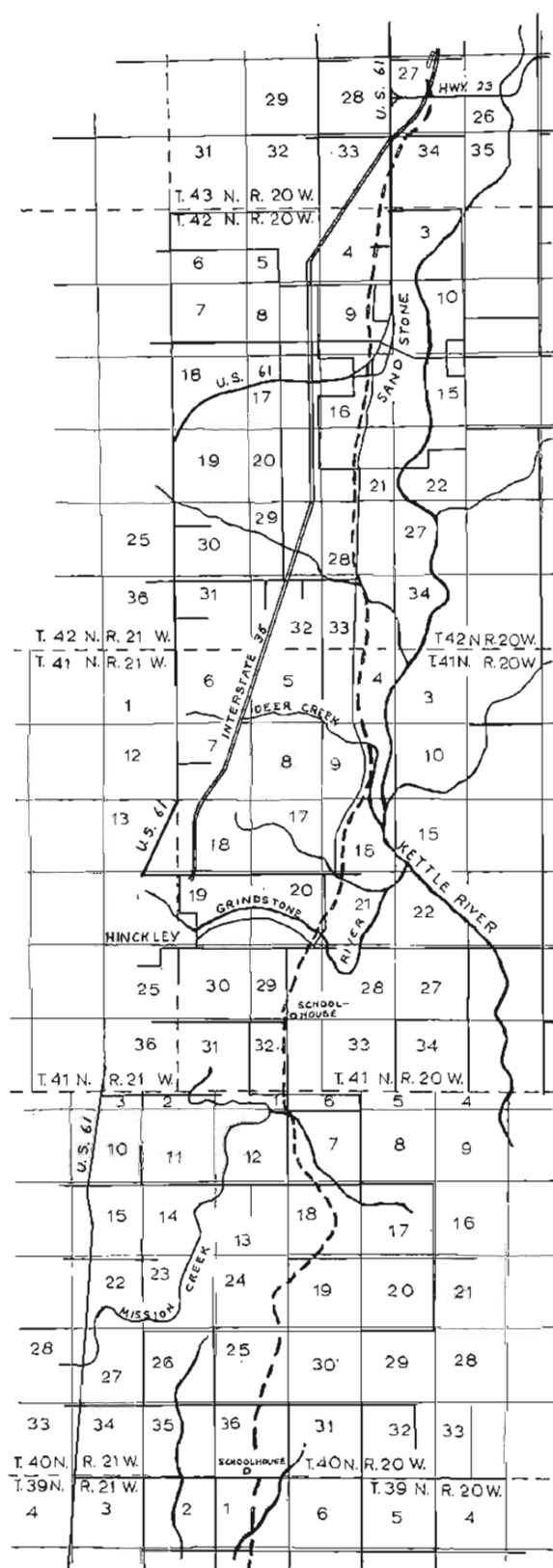
FROM THE Washington-Chisago County line the military road continued northeast through sections 31 and 29 to the northwest part of section 28 of T. 33 N. R. 19 W. At this point Highway 95 has been routed across a swamp, but the old road ran along the hillside to the west, then northeast through sections 21, 16, and 9 to Lawrence Creek in section 3. There a three-mile section of the first survey line was rerouted. As laid out by Knauer, the road ran downstream a considerable distance before crossing the creek, but Simpson took it to the head of a ravine a short distance west of where the present county road crosses, then followed along the east side of this ravine down to the creek. (See map, p. 238.)¹⁴

On the north side the military road apparently angled to the right up along the high bank to the top of the bluff. The county road runs directly across the creek and through a deep cut in the north bank, then across sections 35, 26, and 25 of T. 34 N. R. 19 W. to Taylors Falls. The old road also entered the town from the west. It ran downhill to where Folsom Street comes into the highway from the left and there turned off to the right. The route it followed over the top of the bluff, past the house of William H. C. Folsom, then down along the edge of the hill to the main street of Taylors Falls is still called Government Street.

In Taylors Falls, as elsewhere, a hundred years have made many changes. From the foot of the bluff the old road ran toward the St. Croix, then north along the bank of



¹⁴ Simpson to Abert, September 23, 1853, and accompanying map (Roads 113), Letters Received, Topographical Engineers, NARG 77.



the river to a rocky knoll. This rock outcrop can still be seen at the Minnesota end of the Northern States Power Company's dam. If the military road was constructed as originally laid out, then it ran along between this knoll and the river, and at least a half mile of it is now under water. Possibly three-quarters of a mile upriver the route turned up the bluff. An old road barely apparent to the eye ascends the bluff at this point; it could be the one.

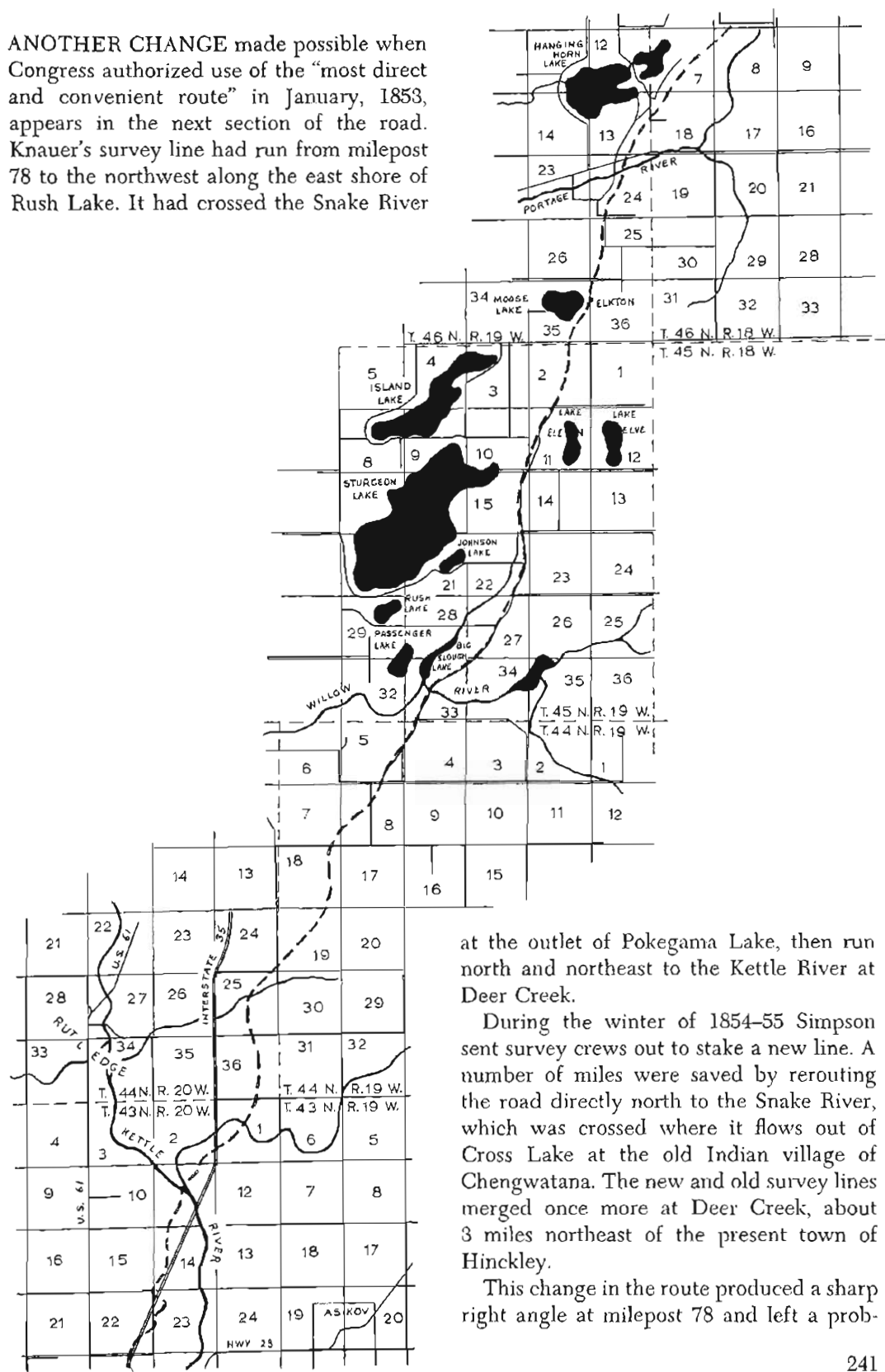
On top of the bluff, farming has destroyed all evidence until one reaches the north line of section 24, where a county road follows the military route in a northerly direction across sections 13, 11, and 2. In section 2 the county road ends, but traces of the older road can be followed on foot through the woods to Dry Creek, where another county road picks up the route and carries it along the St. Croix through sections 35, 34, and 27 of T. 35 N. R. 19 W.

At the south line of section 21 the county road turns west, but the military road continued on along the bank of the river. It crossed Deer Creek at the north line of section 21 and another small stream a little farther on in section 16. To avoid some swampy ground it turned northwest and ran along the foot of a steep hill for a short distance, then up through a sandy ravine to the top of a bluff in section 17.

From this point the old road continued on a northwesterly course through sections 8, 5, and 6 of T. 35 N. R. 19 W. and on into section 31 of T. 36 N. R. 19 W. There a bend in the river caused the route to turn southwest through section 36 of T. 36 N. R. 20 W., then west across sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 of T. 35 N. R. 20 W. to the Sunrise River, which the road crossed on a bridge 75 feet long.

When work ended for the year 1854 the military road was completed to milepost 78, approximately $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles beyond the Sunrise River. A few measurements on the United States Geological Survey map for this area place this post in the southeast quarter of section 23 of T. 36 N. R. 21 W. — or a long half mile east of the Goose Creek swamp.

ANOTHER CHANGE made possible when Congress authorized use of the "most direct and convenient route" in January, 1853, appears in the next section of the road. Knauer's survey line had run from milepost 78 to the northwest along the east shore of Rush Lake. It had crossed the Snake River



at the outlet of Pokegama Lake, then run north and northeast to the Kettle River at Deer Creek.

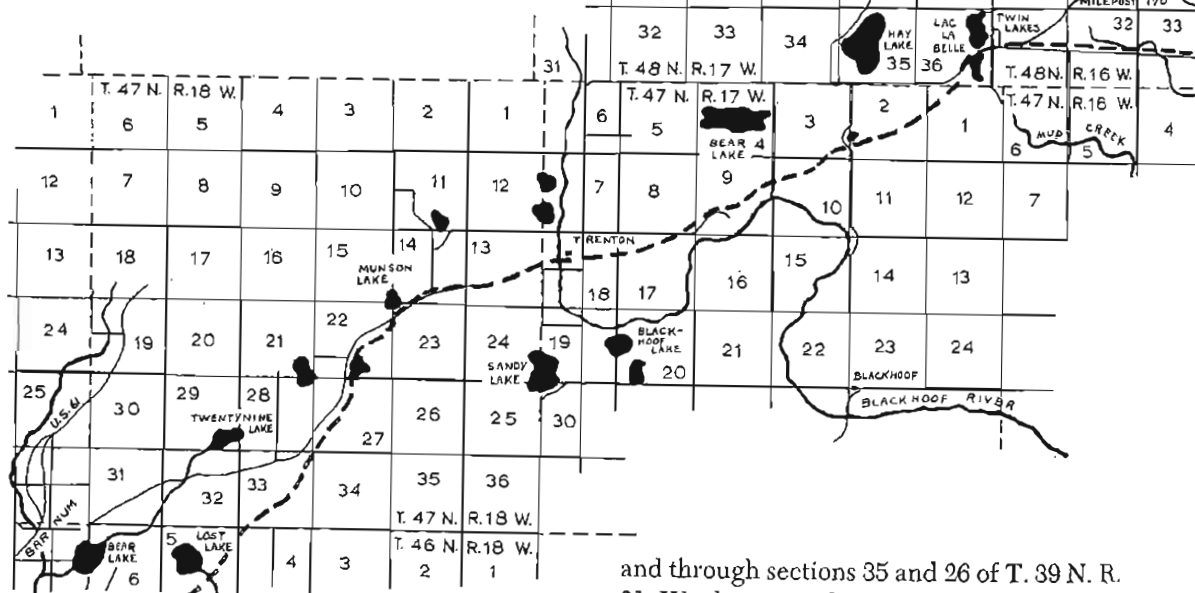
During the winter of 1854-55 Simpson sent survey crews out to stake a new line. A number of miles were saved by rerouting the road directly north to the Snake River, which was crossed where it flows out of Cross Lake at the old Indian village of Chengwatana. The new and old survey lines merged once more at Deer Creek, about 3 miles northeast of the present town of Hinckley.

This change in the route produced a sharp right angle at milepost 78 and left a prob-

lem for the road hunter. Older people in the area say the road did not make a square turn but cut across the corner. The story seems to be confirmed by a plat book of Chisago County published in 1888, which shows a country road running through sections 31, 25, 24, and 23 of T. 36 N. R. 21 W. to Goose Creek in section 14.

After crossing Goose Creek, the military road continued across sections 11 and 2 of T. 36 N. R. 21 W. and sections 35, 26, 23, 14, 11, and 2 of T. 37 N. R. 21 W. on a line now followed by a county road. Where it crossed Rush Creek in section 14 of the latter township, George Folsom built a house that became a stopping place for travelers. To this a store and mill were

As before, the military road is here shown by a broken line. The solid red line follows the route of the 1851 survey north to the St. Louis River near present-day Carlton, and the extension from milepost 170 east to Superior as laid out by William Rock in the winter of 1854-55.

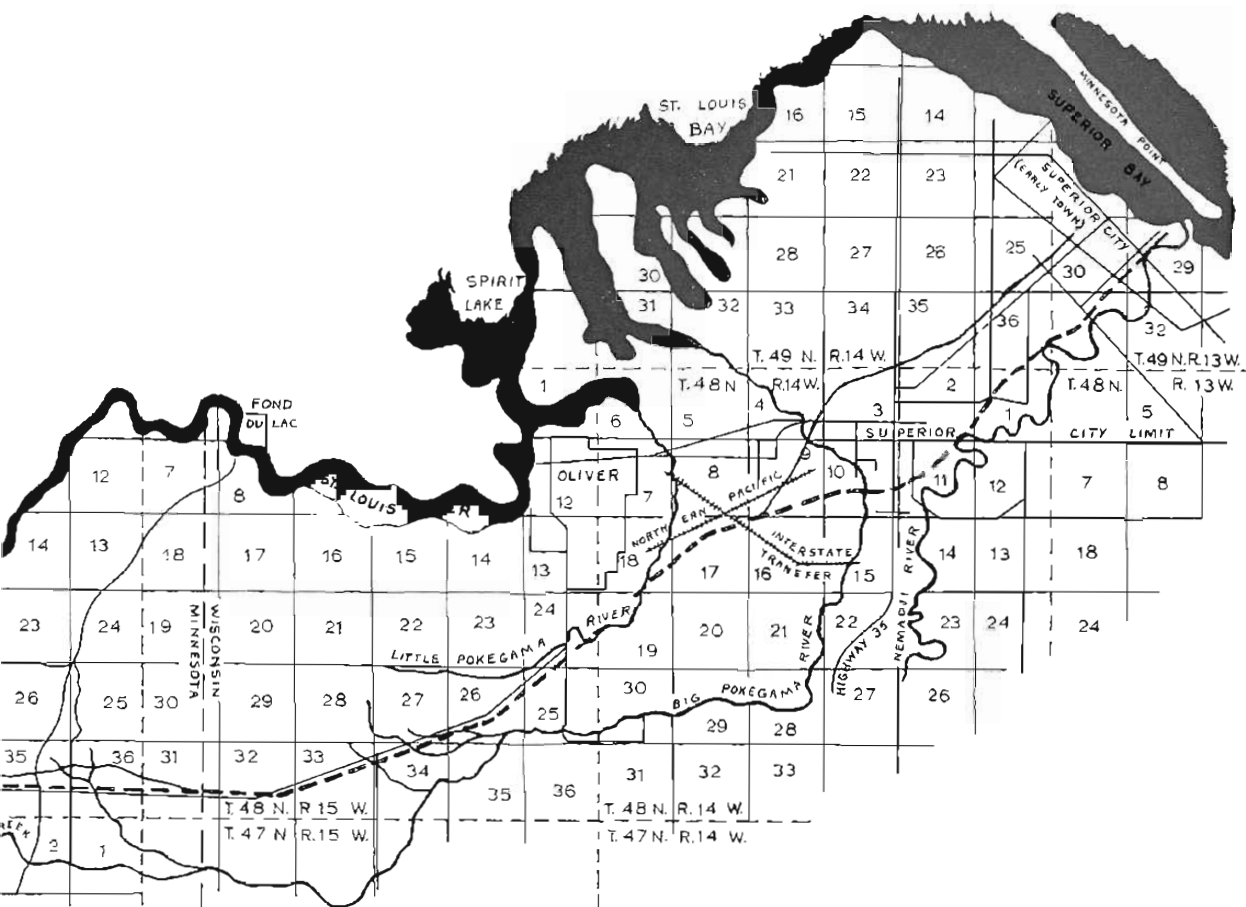


added, and several of the early maps mark the place "Rushby" or "Rushseba."¹⁵ Beyond Rush Creek the road soon crosses the Chisago-Pine County line and continues north through sections 35, 26, 23, 14, 11, and 2 of T. 38 N. R. 21 W. At the north line of section 2 the county road ends, but the old route continues on across a farmyard

and through sections 35 and 26 of T. 39 N. R. 21 W. down to the Snake River crossing. (See map, p. 239.)

The first bridge over the Snake River, made of wood and 175 feet long, was built during the summer and fall of 1855. It was wrecked by high water a year or so later and had to be replaced. Its exact location can only be guessed at, as at least three new

¹⁵ Folsom, *Fifty Years in the Northwest*, 343.



bridges have spanned the river at that point since 1855.

With the arrival of the military road, a townsite was platted on the angle of ground east of Cross Lake and north of the Snake River, which had long been the site of an Indian village. Alhambra, promoted by Judd, Walker, and Company of Marine and Daniel A. Robertson of St. Paul in 1856, existed chiefly on paper for several years and was then replatted, reverting to the Indian name of Chengwatana. It prospered modestly until 1869, when it was bypassed by the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad and was replaced by Pine City, which grew up beside the railroad tracks on the west bank of the lake.¹⁴

The military road ran along the east side of Cross Lake through sections 26, 23, 14,

and the northwest tip of section 13, where it crossed over a causeway and bridge. It then continued north through sections 12 and 1 of T. 39 N. R. 21 W. and sections 36 and 25 of T. 40 N. R. 21 W. In section 24 it turned northeast into section 19 of T. 40 N. R. 20 W., then headed north again through sections 18, 7, and 6. (See map, p. 240.)

In T. 41 N. R. 20 W. it passed through sections 32, 29, and 20 to the Grindstone River, which it crossed just to the west of the present bridge. Through the northwest quarter of section 21 it can still be traced with ease, running northeast across a pasture to a very brushy brook. Beyond this the route has again been converted to a county road and can be followed by car through sections 16, 9, and 4 of T. 41 N. R. 20 W. and through sections 33, 28, and 21 of T. 42 N. R. 20 W. to Sandstone in sections 16 and 9. Beyond

¹⁴ Dunn, *The St. Croix*, 188.

the town it crosses section 4 of T. 42 N. R. 20 W. and sections 33, 34, and 27 of T. 43 N. R. 20 W. Sandstone was not a point on the original route, as it did not develop until 1885, when the quarries on the Kettle River were opened up.¹⁷

Where State Highway 23 crosses the military route, Interstate Highway 35, coming from the southwest, takes over the old road through the north half of section 27 and almost across section 22. Near the northeast corner of this section the route made a short bend to the west to avoid some low ground, then turned northeast again through sections 14 and 11 to the Kettle River crossing. (See map, p. 241.) A bridge 96 feet long was built here in 1855, but it was so badly damaged by high water a year or so later that it needed extensive repairs.

Fortuna, another "paper town," was platted at this point. With the bridge at its center, it extended one mile from east to west and half a mile from south to north.¹⁸ Except for an old landing camp, the only evidence of an occupant is a cellar hole on the east side of the river not far from the bridge site. This may mark the location of the Kettle River stage station.

About a hundred feet southwest of the cellar hole the military road crossed Cane Creek and ran northeast through sections 11, 2, and 1 of T. 43 N. R. 20 W., sections 36, 25, and 24 of T. 44 N. R. 20 W., and sections 19, 18, 7, 8, 5, and 4 of T. 44 N. R. 19 W. to the Willow River bridge. Shortly before reaching Willow River the route is picked up by a county road which follows it northeast through sections 33, 34, 27, 22, 15, 10, 11, and 2 of T. 45 N. R. 19 W. to the Pine-Carlton County line. The traveled portion ends at a farmhouse in the south part of section 2, and the next three miles or more through the rest of section 2 and sections 35 and 25 of T. 46 N. R. 19 W. must be traversed on foot through woodland and pasture, to the east shore of Little Moose Lake, the location of the Elkton stage station.

The old route becomes a county road

again near the southwest corner of section 24 and winds northeasterly across the Portage River in section 24, then through section 13. Near the center of section 7 of T. 46 N. R. 18 W. the old route once more takes off across country, making it necessary to negotiate $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles on foot through sections 7 and 5 and section 33 of T. 47 N. R. 18 W. Near the northeast corner of section 33 a county road again takes up the route, first in a northerly, then in a northeasterly direction through sections 27, 22, 23, and 14, to the west line of section 13 in T. 47 N. R. 18 W. (See map, p. 242.)

Only the hardy will follow the next 7 or 8 miles of the route across section 13 of T. 47 N. R. 18 W. and through sections 18, 17, 9, 10, 3, 2, and 1 of T. 47 N. R. 17 W. This part of the old road is almost totally abandoned. In section 18 it crosses the Blackhoof River, on the east bank of which the town of Trenton was platted and the Blackhoof stage station once stood.¹⁹ Both have vanished.

Twin Lakes, now called Scott's Corner, in section 36 of T. 48 N. R. 17 W. was once a place of some importance on the military road. It had a stage station which also served as a trading post, general store, and courthouse—for this was the seat of Carlton County from 1857 to 1870. When the courthouse was moved to Carlton and traffic ceased on the military road, Twin Lakes dwindled to its present status as a country crossroads.²⁰

The first survey line for the Point Douglas-St. Louis River road ran northeast from

¹⁷Locating the route in the Sandstone area and farther north was greatly expedited by the help of Colonel John N. Stubler, retired, of Sandstone, another old roads enthusiast.

¹⁸A copy of the plat of Fortuna is in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society. See also, Dunn, *The St. Croix*, 186.

¹⁹"Map . . . of the U.S. Military Roads," (Roads 156) NARG 77. For a description of the Blackhoof station, see John T. Trowbridge, "Railroad Route From St. Paul to Duluth in 1869," in *Minnesota History*, 37:107, 107n. (September, 1960).

²⁰Trowbridge, in *Minnesota History*, 37:108, 108n.

Twin Lakes to the vicinity of Wrenshall, then north to a falls on the St. Louis River just below Thomson Dam, probably about where Otter Creek comes in from the west. After Congress changed the northern terminal to Superior in 1854 Simpson's assistant, William Rock, ran the line for this extension in a southeasterly direction from milepost 170 to the Wisconsin state line in section 31 of T. 48 N. R. 15 W., then east and northeast through Wisconsin to Superior. Construction apparently did not follow the survey, for all information available at this time indicates that instead of starting near milepost 170 this extension to the military road ran a comparatively straight course east from Twin Lakes to the Minnesota-Wisconsin line.²¹ The route is still in use as a county road.

IN WISCONSIN the line ran east then northeast across sections 31, 32, 33, 34, 27, 26, 25, and about half way across section 24 of T. 48 N. R. 15 W. At this point the county road turns north to the town of Oliver, but the old route continued to the northeast through the brush and swamps of sections 19, 18, and 17 of T. 48 N. R. 14 W., crossing the Little Pokegama River two times on the way.

Near the north line of section 17, where the Interstate Transfer Railway and the Northern Pacific Railway intersect, the military road seemed to end in a bog. Two attempts to locate it from this bog to Supe-

rior along Rock's survey line failed to produce a trace of it. At last, on a third attempt, the author learned that local tradition placed the military road a mile or more farther south. A more careful look at Simpson's annual report for 1855 solved the riddle: the last 7 miles leading into Superior had been relocated.²² With this information and an early Geological Survey map it was easy to trace the new route. From the bog in the north part of section 17 the road ran in a more easterly direction through sections 9 and 10. In section 10 there had been two bridges over the Big Pokegama River, both indicated by a few old pilings, about 40 rods apart. The survey map showed that the one farther south had been built for the military road.

After crossing the Pokegama the old road ran along the north side of the Nemadji River through sections 11, 2, and 1 of T. 48 N. R. 14 W., section 36 of T. 49 N. R. 14 W., and sections 31 and 30 of T. 49 N. R. 13 W. to Lake Superior. The last 4 miles are within the southern limit of the city of Superior. There the route is effectively blocked in several places by the high fence of the Lakehead Pipeline Company. In another spot the municipal golf course has rearranged the landscape with a bulldozer.

On the west bank of the Nemadji River, in Nemadji Park, the Daughters of the American Revolution have erected a bronze marker to honor the pioneers who in 1853 established the first settlement at Superior and who on January 2, 1854, started cutting the "Old Military Road" from this point. The road referred to on the marker was a 57-mile track cut out during the early months of 1854 between the settlement at Superior and Chase's Landing on the St. Croix River. It was a shorter route to Taylors Falls than the official government road, and it continued to be used extensively in the winter months. Several travelers, however, described it as absolutely impassable in summer.²³ The chance to acquire several miles of this road already partially built was no doubt a factor in changing the last 7 miles

²¹ 34 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 470 (serial 811). An old resident of Scott's Corner told the author that a road leading east from that point existed before the present county road. In the early 1900s it was filled with weeds and seldom used. No evidence of a road is traceable from milepost 170.

²² 34 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 470 (serial 811).

²³ Dwight E. Woodbridge and John S. Pardee, *History of Duluth and St. Louis County*, 1:229 (Chicago, 1910); Walter Van Brunt, ed., *Duluth and St. Louis County, Minnesota*, 1:105-109 (Chicago and New York, 1921). The settlers' road would be nearly impossible to trace. It probably went south through Wisconsin as far as the St. Croix, on about the line now taken by Highway 35.



Captain James H. Simpson in 1857

of the government route into Superior. It has also brought about much confusion in historical records as to what is meant by the "military road."

IN HIS REPORT for September 15, 1851, made before the first survey had been completed, Lieutenant Simpson estimated that the road would cost not "much short of \$73,000," or about \$350 per mile. Since Congress had appropriated only \$15,000, and on the survey alone he had already spent more than \$3,000, it was clear that more money would be needed. This, however, was slow in coming, and by the summer of 1852 it looked as though the whole project might be abandoned.²⁴

A new appropriation was passed in the fall and was signed by the president in January, 1853. It made a sum of \$20,000 available for the next season's work, and by the fall of 1853 the road had been completed from Stillwater to a point some twelve miles beyond Taylors Falls. Another \$20,000 was voted the following July, but with it was the stipulation that the northern terminal be changed, and that the extension of the route to Superior be completed before money was spent on the rest of the road. Simpson vigorously resisted this, pointing

out that spending the appropriation "at but one extremity of the road, and that the most inaccessible," would bring no useful results. Instead he proposed to apply the money over "as great an extent of the road as possible," and establish communication between Superior and the St. Croix Valley as early as it could be done.²⁵

Nearly a whole season was wasted before the red tape was cut and Simpson received authorization to go ahead as he saw fit. In the winter of 1854-55 the survey of the Superior extension was finished, and in March, 1855, Congress granted another \$34,000 for the final completion of the road. During the following summer, work was pushed rapidly ahead. Simpson's plan was to cut a narrow track through the forest, do a minimum amount of grubbing, and build bridges where absolutely needed. Grading, filling, culverts, and corduroy could wait.²⁶

The effort fell far short, for when Simpson was replaced in June, 1856, his successor, Captain George Thom, found the middle and northern sections of the road still impassable for wagons, and according to the mail carrier at that time some 60 miles could not be traveled even on horseback. Work on the southernmost 19 miles had not been started. The last appropriation—\$31,425.50—was made in 1857, yet in September of that year Thom estimated that another \$44,000 would be needed to make the road "practicable in all weather and in all seasons of the year."²⁷

An even gloomier picture was painted by

²⁴ 32 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 440 (serial 611); Larsen, "The Minnesota Road System," 61.

²⁵ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:150, 306; 34 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 469 (serial 811).

²⁶ United States, *Statutes at Large*, 10:638; 34 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 470 (serial 811). The roadway itself was to be 18 feet wide, with a 3½-foot strip on each side "cut close to the ground."

²⁷ Dunn, *The St. Croix*, 156; United States, *Statutes at Large*, 11:203; 34 Congress, 3 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 5, p. 369 (serial 876); 35 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 11, p. 351 (serial 920).

Captain Howard Stansbury, who replaced Thom in April, 1858. Unusually high water during the months of July and August that summer demonstrated the need for more corduroying and ditching than had been planned. In his annual report that fall, Stansbury raised the estimate of money needed for finishing the road to \$50,000. But the exact figure mattered little, since no

more funds were forthcoming. A small amount of grubbing and ditching done in 1858 under contracts already let was the last federally financed work on the road. Just over \$120,600 had been spent.²⁸

Despite its permanently unfinished condition, the military road was a vital link in Minnesota's transportation system and received heavy use throughout the following decade. The first mail seems to have been carried over it on horseback and afoot early in 1856. Stage service had begun by 1861 and continued, subject to interruption from weather and road conditions, until August, 1870, although the trip was never one for the faint of heart.²⁹ When the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad opened its line connecting St. Paul with Duluth, through traffic on the old road ceased almost overnight. Before many years even its exact route had been forgotten, except for a few sections which remained in local use until fairly recent times.

²⁸ 35 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 11, p. 355 (serial 920); 35 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 1195 (serial 976); Larsen, "The Minnesota Road System," 109-111.

²⁹ Dunn, *The St. Croix*, 156; Woodbridge and Pardee, *Duluth and St. Louis County*, 1:240; Van Brunt, *Duluth and St. Louis County*, 1:154-156. The stage line never used the southern section of the military road but left it west of Sunrise, taking a more direct route to St. Paul via Wyoming, the now vanished settlement of Columbus, and the cluster of lakes known as the Rice Lakes in southeastern Anoka County.

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The last stage over the military road leaving Superior in August, 1870





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