



THE CAPITOL is the focal point of the Capitol approach. Downtown St. Paul business buildings are in the foreground.

A Half Century of CAPITAL CONFLICT

How St. Paul Kept the Seat of Government

Neil B. Thompson

WHEN THE Minnesota legislature opened its 1905 session in the new statehouse on Capitol Hill in St. Paul, an era ended. From the establishment of Minnesota Territory in 1849 the atomistic quicksilver machinations of the frontier mind had been a compelling force in the area's affairs. At century's end, the group that fought to construct an expensive monument to house the state's government represented new forces that demanded organization and stability. After more than a half century of almost continuous threats to remove the seat of government to hither or yon, the forces of stability won: St. Paul would be the capital of Minnesota. The land on which Father Lucien Galtier built his crude log church in 1841 to serve the spiritual needs of the earliest Minnesota settlements came at last to be the nucleus for their political activities.

From the extension of United States authority to the

¹David Riesman, *et al.*, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, 28-32 (Garden City, New York, 1954).

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headwaters of the Mississippi with the founding of Fort Snelling in 1819 to the legislative decision to build the new Capitol in 1893, the land that is Minnesota had been an amorphous entity on which the minds of men with many interests had attempted to impose order and structure. When the elongated, north-south shape of Minnesota had been defined by Congress in 1856 in accordance with the concept outlined by Henry M. Rice, the Democratic territorial delegate, the soon-to-be state's economy was forced into a diversified mode that included mining and timber as well as grain and livestock farming. The boundaries also made its rivers, the natural transportation lines of the new state, inadequate for an orderly expansion of settlement and of economic activity. Political geography, then, prescribed a multi-regional entity which people somehow had to put together into a coherent whole. Inner-directed men (to use David Riesman's apt phrase)¹ moved into the undeveloped region and sought to seize wealth and power for themselves by "booming" towns and cities wherever the promoters held land to which there was a chance of attracting settlers. Thus the social behavior of the frontiersman, so like the uninhibited, accidental, unpredictable behavior of atomic particles, unwittingly imposed an order on the land — an order that served, either well or badly as the case might be, the incoming settlers and the state. Frontier developers were full of

individualistic, greedy, and chaotic schemes, among which were frequent attempts to manipulate the location of the seat of the state's government.

The opportunity to grab the "brass ring" was not inhibited by the act which established the territorial government of Minnesota in 1849. Congress had directed that the first territorial legislative assembly should meet in St. Paul and authorized that body and the governor to establish a temporary seat of government. The act also empowered them to "prescribe by law the manner of locating the permanent seat of government of said Territory by a vote of the people."² Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Territories and sponsor of the act establishing Minnesota Territory, inserted this clause because his Jacksonian faith insisted that the people were able, willing, and, by right, ought to decide all things relating to their government. The same concept, labeled "squatter sovereignty" by its opponents (including Abraham Lincoln), would bring the nation to the brink of secession in 1854 with the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Allowing the settlers in a region to determine the total shape of their political future would, the opposition said, carry the territories into the evils of democratic excess. If democratic excess implied indecision and self-seeking, then the pioneers of the North Star State would prove the point.

Governor Alexander Ramsey advised the first territorial legislature of its responsibility in the matter of a capital and suggested that "it would be premature with our comparatively small population, to decide, at this time, so important a question as the location of the permanent seat of government."³ Then James S. Norris of Cottage Grove introduced a joint resolution in the territorial council, fixing St. Paul as the temporary seat, but the resolution died from the burden of dreams and schemes of frontier politicians. In the frenzy of parliamentary manipulations, St. Anthony and Sauk Rapids were offered as substitutes. Another scheme proposed selecting a site on the east side of the Mississippi River within five miles of a point directly opposite the mouth of the Crow Wing River. Attesting to the quixotic nature of that proposal is the fact that the area is still innocent of any kind of planned urban development. The effort to reach a decision aroused so much heat that the question was laid by. Then, on the last day of the session, Norris' proposal, with the added provision that the governor "rent" adequate buildings for the use of the government, was reintroduced and passed.⁴ The first decision was a compromise.

The second territorial legislature played out what is, to frontier historians, a familiar drama. Stillwater was selected as the site of the state prison, St. Anthony as the location of the University of Minnesota, and St. Paul as the place for the construction of the Capitol. All three

bills supporting these sites were passed within a month. Although the usual amendments were offered and the council endured "interminable filibustering," funds were appropriated and the machinery for implementing the decision was established. The principal opposition seems to have emanated from a coalition of legislators from the city of St. Anthony and Benton County. It was S. Baldwin Olmstead of Belle Prairie, in Scott County, who moved to change the title to "A bill to provide for carrying out a magnificent scheme of log-rolling, by which a presiding officer of this House and a Territorial Printer was [sic] elected." While the house speaker was undoubtedly right in labeling the motion as "highly indecorous," his ruling inferred nothing about the truth or falsity of the allegation.⁵

The issue seemed to have dissipated. The construction of a Capitol at Exchange and Wabasha streets for the sum of \$31,222.65 was accomplished with a certain degree of pride, and the fifth session of the legislature convened in the new structure early in 1854.⁶ Its modest size and simple solidarity seemed to give permanence to the situation. The moot character of the decision, however, was detected by the promoters and speculators. Not loath to probe the matter, various groups began looking for the right moment to reopen the capital question. It came when the territory was moving into statehood. Tradition holds that a scheme had been carefully worked out to remove the capital from St. Paul but that the scenario got out of hand, some of the characters began to ad lib their lines, and the project turned into one of the most notorious stories in all of Minnesota's history.

THE TALE BEGAN innocently enough. Less than

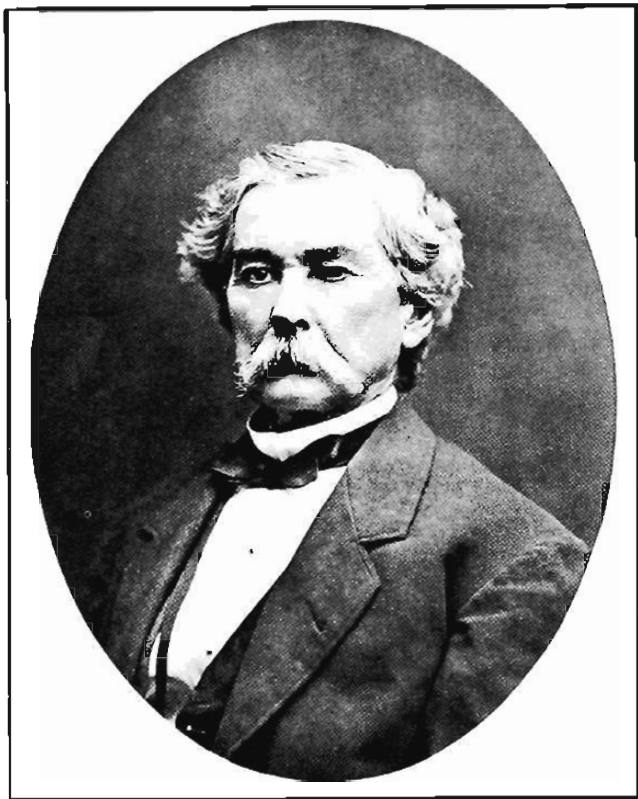
²United States, *Statutes at Large*, 9:407-8; William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:243-44 (St. Paul, 1956).

³William B. Dean, "A History of the Capitol Buildings of Minnesota, With Some Account of the Struggles for Their Location," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:4 (St. Paul, 1908).

⁴Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:5-6. Norris and his brother-in-law, Joseph Haskell, were Washington County settlers, believed to be the first to demonstrate that wheat could be successfully grown in Minnesota. See Merrill E. Jarchow, *The Earth Brought Forth: A History of Minnesota Agriculture to 1885* (St. Paul, 1949); Henry H. Sibley, "Reminiscences: Historical and Personal," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1:391 (St. Paul, 1902).

⁵Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:6-7; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:260 (filibustering quote), 261; William P. Murray, "Recollections of Early Territorial Days and Legislation," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:116; *Minnesota, House Journal*, 1851, p. 62.

⁶Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:9. The St. Paul Arts and Science Center presently occupies the site, appropriately enough. Tragedy, comedy, and heroism should always commemorate the soil where a political entity has its beginning.



GOVERNOR WILLIS A. GORMAN

three years after the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851, William B. Dodd, Oliver Ames, and William L. Ames claimed 500 acres largely on the west bank of the Minnesota River just below Traverse des Sioux and proclaimed the establishment of the new town of Rock Bend. From that point things began to pick up speed in frontier fashion.

Rock Bend was renamed St. Peter in 1854. On February 1 of that year, territorial Governor Willis A. Gorman and six other gentlemen (including the secretary of the territory, J. Traverse Rosser) purchased seven-

tenths of the Ames and Dodd claims. The ten men organized a joint-stock venture called the St. Peter Company, with Gorman as its president, and began "booming" their town. The territorial legislature incorporated the company in 1856 in a routine act remarkable only for giving the new corporation the privilege of doing "any and all acts that the members thereof might or could lawfully do as individuals."⁷

On February 6, 1857, "near the middle of what was understood to be the last session of the territorial legislature," the "boomers" began stoking the legislative boilers to a full head of steam. William D. Lowry, council member from Rochester, introduced a bill to remove the capital from St. Paul. The bill also accepted an offer by the St. Peter Company of a suitable "lot of ground within the limits of the town of St. Peter" and the sum of \$20,000 to be used in construction. Apparently with little or no public outcry, the bill was passed on February 12 by a vote of eight to seven.⁸

The house of representatives acted with greater promptness; the bill was read the first and second times on February 16 and brought forth on the next day for the third and final reading. Apparently the opposition was still disorganized. An attempt to arrange a filibuster failed; and when William Branch of St. Paul moved on February 18 to change the title to a "Bill for the sale of town lots in St. Peter," his proposition was summarily voted down. The bitterness of the occasion is attested to by the proposal of the Ramsey County legislators to strike the words "St. Peter" and insert "Nicollet Island," located above the Falls of St. Anthony. The Ramsey County people were willing to go to any lengths to stop the onslaught, but the motion was defeated by one vote. The representatives from St. Anthony, who voted against the motion, were "a modest set with small heads," in the opinion of William P. Murray of Ramsey County. The juggernaut rolled on, for the house passed the bill by a vote of twenty to seventeen on that same day (February 18). It was returned to the council to be enrolled and engrossed and sent on to the governor. On February 27 the enrolled bill landed on the desk of the chairman of the committee of enrolled bills, Joseph Rolette.⁹

All was not quiet, however. Anguished cries arose from the pages of the St. Paul newspapers, charges of corruption and fraud echoed in the legislative chambers, and the proponents of the removal had to rally to stop a resolution ordering an investigation of the affair. On February 28 St. A. D. Balcombe of Winona offered a resolution ordering that the enrolled bill be presented to the council forthwith.¹⁰ And the comic opera began — if, indeed, it had not already begun.

When Balcombe requested a vote on his resolution, Henry N. Setzer of Taylors Falls asked for a call of the council. At that point the bill's proponents made a fatal

⁷William B. Gresham, *History of Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties, Minnesota; Their People, Industries and Institutions*, 1:192 (Indianapolis, 1916); *Minnesota Territory, Laws*, 1856, p. 73 (quote)—75.

⁸Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:382 (first quote); *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 98, 119–21; *Laws*, 1857, p. 4 (St. Peter quote).

⁹H. P. Hall, *Observations: Being More or Less a History of Political Contests in Minnesota, From 1849 to 1904*, 27, 29 (St. Paul, 1904); *House Journal*, 1857, p. 152, 154, 159, 162–67, 171–73 (Branch quote), 174–75; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:382; Murray, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:116. The nature of the lost opportunity is reflected in the Minneapolis city planning staff's present proposal for Nicollet Island. See *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 14, 1972, p. 1B.

¹⁰*St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*, February 20, 1857, p. 2; Hall, *Observations*, 28; *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 169, 177.

mistake: They allowed the call to go through. Council rule XXXII provided: "Any member may make a call of the Council, and require absent members to be sent for . . . the call of the Council being ordered, and the absentees noted, the doors shall be closed and no member permitted to leave the room until the report of the Sergeant-at-Arms be received and acted upon, or further proceedings in the call be suspended by a vote of two-thirds of the Council present."¹¹ In short, the council was frozen and unable to transact any business until all members were present in the chamber. When the roll was called, one was missing.¹² The doors were ordered closed.

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday passed. John M. Lamb, sergeant at arms, scoured the town for the missing councilman and duly reported daily after each search that the gentleman could not be found. The proprietor of the Fuller House, the hotel where most of the members stopped during the session, sent "bounteous refreshments, in which wine was a large factor" to the council chamber. Bedding was brought in, and the members slept in the aisles. At last, on Thursday, "the Council adjourned at 1 o'clock P.M. on March 5th, A.D. 1857, after having continued in session without adjournment or recess one hundred and twenty-three hours."¹³

The laconic record of the council *Journal* indicates that Friday was like all the other days, and Saturday, March 7, started out the same. The members voted for two recesses during the day, and at 7:30 P.M. the group reassembled to play out the last act of the comedy. A committee from the house of representatives appeared, but the chair ruled that no "communication" from the house could be received since the council was still under the call. John D. Ludden of Marine, who had previously voted for the call, asked for a reconsideration of that vote. The members voted to dispense with the call, and two committee reports were heard. William Freeborn from the committee on enrolled bills reported that the bill for the removal of the capital could not be presented to the council for final action — that is, passage and forwarding to the governor for his signature — because upon comparison of the enrolled bill with the engrossed bill "numerous errors" were found. The call of the council was again ordered. There was nothing more to be done. On the final roll call three members were absent. "At 12 o'clock at night the President . . . announced that the time limited by law for the continuation of the Session of the Territorial Legislature had expired, and he therefore declared the Council adjourned without day [*sic*]."¹⁴

Most writers of Minnesota territorial history have provided versions of the comic relief that flickered against the deadly serious drama taking place in the council chamber. The facts on which all seem able to agree are

simple enough. Joseph Rolette, councilman from Pembina (then a part of Minnesota Territory), who was chairman of the council committee on enrolled bills, simply carried the engrossed and enrolled bill on capital removal with him when he left the chamber on February 27. He did not return to the chamber until the session ended. Most reports claim he slipped into his seat as the president's gavel banged the adjournment, although the council *Journal* does not indicate whether or not he was present.¹⁵

The more colorful accounts (and the ones least susceptible of verification) hold that Jolly Joe stopped off at Truman M. Smith's bank, which was located on the ground floor of the Fuller House, and asked that worthy gentleman to lock the papers in his safe. Rolette then had his effects removed to a room on the top floor of the hostelry and informed the proprietor that he, Rolette, would like everyone to believe that he had left town. When the proponents of removal fell into the fortuitous trap of the call of the council, Rolette saw the opportunity and simply remained in hiding. For the next week he was conspicuous for his absence — except to a few close friends, among whom were numbered some members of the legislature and the council's sergeant at arms. These confidants helped him while away the evening hours with food, drink, and a lively game of poker. When the affair ended, Rolette was lionized by the citizens of St. Paul as the man who saved the capital for their city and was assured a place in the state's history.¹⁶

But the gentlemen who favored St. Peter did not give up easily. A copy of the capital removal bill was signed by Speaker J. W. Furber of the house but *not*

¹¹ *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 48.

¹² *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 177.

¹³ Hall, *Observations*, 35 (first quote). The \$500.00 bill that resulted from the Fuller House catering was finally paid, according to Hall. See also *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 177–82 (last quote); *St. Paul Pioneer and Democrat*, March 3, 5 [p. 2]. In the latter issue, a tongue-in-cheek editorial noted that: "We esteem Mr. John Lamb, Sergeant-at-Arms of the Council, one of the most indefatigable, zealous and perserving public officers we have ever known. Disregarding the joys of social life, the gay companionship of his friends, and the allurements which . . . are daily presented to nice and good-looking young men in St. Paul, Mr. Lamb has been engaged since Saturday last . . . scouring the country in pursuit of Mr. Rolette."

¹⁴ *Council Journal*, 1857, p. 182–84 (quote); Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:12.

¹⁵ Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:382–87; Hall, *Observations*, 28–32; Return I. Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 2:495–99; J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of St. Paul and of the County of Ramsey, Minnesota*, 370–72 (St. Paul, 1876); Edward D. Neill, *The History of Minnesota: From the Earliest French Explorations to the Present Time*, 618–21 (Philadelphia, 1858).

¹⁶ Hall, *Observations*, 28–32; "Joe Rolette and the Capital Caper," in *Roots*, Fall, 1972, p. 14–17.



JOSEPH ROLETTE



ST PETER COMPANY officials built this white frame structure (above, center) on the banks of the Minnesota to serve as the new State Capitol. For years it served as the Nicollet County courthouse.

by John B. Brisbin, council president, who listed seven reasons for withholding his signature. Governor Gorman, however, signed the bill into law on March 5, 1857. Acting on the presumed validity of the bill, officials of the St. Peter Company selected a lot in their town and erected a frame building on it to serve as the Capitol. But territorial officers failed to move into the new structure by May 1, the limit set in the removal bill. This prompted Alfred F. Howes, the company president, to sue for a writ of mandamus in the second district court to compel newly appointed Governor Samuel Medary and other territorial officers to remove themselves and the seat of government to St. Peter. On July 12 Judge Rensselaer R. Nelson refused the petition, and the curtain rang down on the removal affair. After the court's decision, town lots in St. Peter, for which offers of \$1,500 in gold had been refused, "could have been purchased for fifteen dollars."¹⁷

In 1858, when Minnesota became a state, officials used the same Capitol building that had served the territorial government. The state law, which located the capital in St. Paul, was also straight out of the territorial

tradition. Article 15, section one of the new state constitution left the capital where it had been and gave the legislature the choice of changing the seat of government by a "vote of the people." All the old options remained.

Time makes tradition, and improvements on property increase the capitalization until one must think twice before making drastic changes. In 1866 gaslights were installed in the statehouse, and, five years later, city water and steam heat replaced the water coolers and stoves. In 1872 a new addition to the structure was built, and in 1878 another wing was erected. Then, on the evening of March 1, 1881, two days before the end of the session and while the legislature was meeting late, the Capitol burned to the ground. During the night, city officers and citizens of St. Paul came to the rescue and made changes in the new markethouse at Seventh and Wabasha streets, some two blocks from the burned building. The next morning state officials took up their duties in the new quarters.

The St. Paul delegation and citizens suffered "serious nervous chills" before the Capitol could be rebuilt, wrote Dean. "A most vigorous move was set on foot, the morning after the destruction of the old building, to remove the capital from St. Paul, and great inducements were said to have been offered to members of the legislature to consider the proposition." Governor John S. Pillsbury ignored the pressure and insisted that

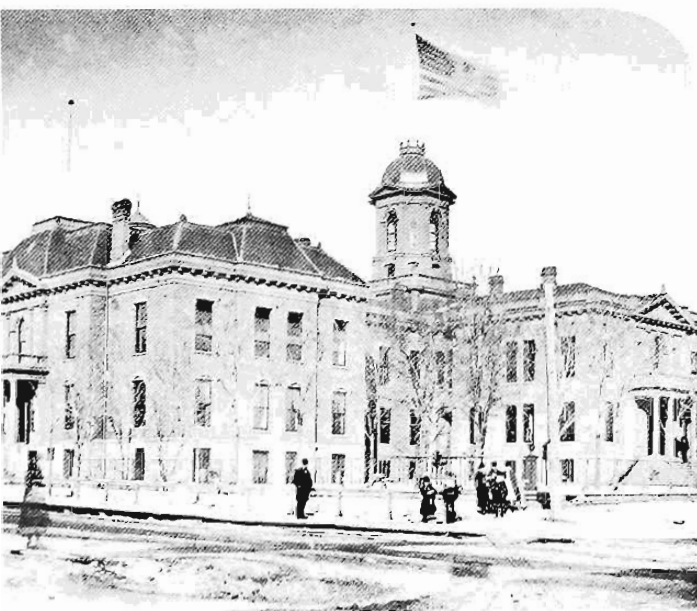
¹⁷*Laws*, 1857, p. 3-7; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:386; Hiram F. Stevens, ed., *History of the Bench and Bar of Minnesota*, 1:54-64 (St. Paul, 1904); Gresham, *Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties*, 1:89, 197 (quote). The frame building was used as a courthouse by Nicollet County from 1858 to 1881.



IN 1857, the Capitol (above, center) was one of the more imposing structures in St. Paul. In the background can be located, from left to right, a Catholic school, a markethouse, Fifth Street, the Capitol, and Central Presbyterian Church.



THE FIRST CAPITOL, as this 1860 photograph indicates, was modest in size and simple in design.



THE CAPITOL (above) was larger, more accommodating, and more impressive looking after additions in 1872 and 1878, along with changes in the dome and roof. It burned down in 1881.

THE SECOND CAPITOL was built in 1883 on the same site as the first statehouse. It served only until 1904.



funds be appropriated for a new Capitol on the old site. The governor had his way; within two years a new building designed in the form of a Greek cross had been erected.¹⁸ The last gasp of the St. Peter Company speculators ended like the first in failure.

EVEN WHILE the St. Peter Company was making its bid for the brass ring, a more pervasive speculation was taking shape to the west. At the very height of the 1856 Minnesota land boom, a group of Minneapolis businessmen, led by a Chisago County man named John Swainson, organized the Kandiyohi Town Site Company. The firm's financial committee was headed by Colonel John H. Stevens, a Canadian-born New Englander who built the first frame house on the west bank of the Mississippi in what became the city of Minneapolis (the house was originally located on the riverbank below the present Burlington Northern station and in 1896 was moved to its present site near Minnehaha Falls). Stevens had been one of the founders and organizers of the town of Glencoe in McLeod County. Somehow the group managed to enlist the services of a young English-born artist, Edwin Whitefield, as a "settlers' artist intent on frontier promotion." He made a number of landscape paintings in the area and used them the next winter in New York and other eastern cities to persuade settlers to go west to Kandiyohi County.¹⁹

Reaching for the stars, the company platted several townsites, the most important of which (in the inner eyes of the speculators) was the town of Kandiyohi, located on the north side of a chain of lakes that included Little Kandiyohi, Kasota, and Minnetaga. In the center of the plat on the summit of a commanding hill overlook-

ing the lakes was "Capitol Square." Their boomer's crystal ball envisioned nothing less than the whole prize. The panic of 1857 put an end to the speculation but not to the dream. It was revived when the congressional enabling act of 1857 provided that the federal government should give ten sections of the public domain to the state for the purpose of "completing the public buildings, or for the erection of others at the seat of government." The first state legislature in 1858 took action that assured acceptance of the grant.²⁰

At the legislature's direction, Governor Henry H. Sibley appointed a three-man commission which acted with great dispatch. Using ox teams and wagons, the three traveled to Kandiyohi County, selected twelve parcels of land, and reported back to the governor within seventeen days after leaving St. Paul. They either had a sharp eye for good lands or more than a modest idea of what lands they intended to choose. The commission reported to Sibley on September 17, 1858, the selection of 6,339.14 acres. The speedy action went for naught, however, because part of the property was too near a projected railroad; since that placed a premium price on the land, the Department of Interior, in the interests of the federal treasury, rejected some of the selections. In a second survey (which required fifty-eight days) substitutions for the rejected lands were found. The final selections, scattered through Fahlun, Lake Elizabeth, Lake Lillian, and East Lake Lillian townships in the southeastern corner of the county, were acceptable to all parties.²¹

Attempts were made during the next three decades to remove the State Capitol to the Kandiyohi "state capitol lands." The first came in 1861, the second in 1869, others in 1872 and 1891, and the last in 1893. The first three seem to have been maneuvers by land speculators; the last two were efforts of the Farmers' Alliance party (Populists) from the western half of the state. The 1869 escapade seems typical of schemes of frontier minds.

The official accounts of the legislative debates on the removal bill of 1869 seem quite commonplace; the uproar in the newspapers suggests an issue of cosmic proportions. The *St. Paul Daily Pioneer* of February 25 attacked the removal proposition as the height of foolishness; Kandiyohi was an inaccessible "howling wilderness" without timber, building stone, water, or people. The *Minneapolis Tribune*, taking the opposite view, railed wildly at the St. Paul paper. In fact, the almost daily commentary of the *Tribune* is a delightful document of the frontier mind, of vitriolic nineteenth-century journalism, and of the embarrassment of backing the wrong horse. One of the Minneapolis paper's earliest pronouncements, on February 25, assured the *Daily Pioneer* that the proposition of removal was no joke. "It was," said the editor with the omniscience of his

¹⁸Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:18, 21-22 (quotes). Dean commented: "Each legislature . . . still continues to elect its firemen, who wander through the chambers and halls of the Capitol in a vain search for the ancient stoves, while the per diem is still gathered in by their willing hands" (p. 18). In 1901 James J. Hill bought out the St. Peter Company because he thought the broad charter provisions might prove valuable. The Great Northern Railroad seems never to have made any use of its subsidiary, but it formally maintained the organization until at least 1936. See *St. Peter Herald*, April 4, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁹Victor E. Lawson and Martin E. Tew, comps., *Illustrated History and Descriptive and Biographical Review of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota*, 8 (St. Paul, 1905); Bertha L. Heilbron, "Edwin Whitefield: Settlers' Artist," in *Minnesota History*, 40:64 (quote), 65 (Summer, 1966).

²⁰Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 8; Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State*, 176-77 (Minneapolis, 1963); United States, *Statutes at Large*, 11:167 (last quote); Minnesota, *Laws*, 1858, p. 284-85.

²¹Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 94; Governor's Message, in *Executive Documents*, 1860, p. 13, 19 (St. Paul, 1861); *Saint Paul Daily Pioneer*, February 25, March 5, 1869.



EDWIN WHITEFIELD painted this water color of Lake Lillian, one of several he made in Kandiyohi County near the "state capitol lands." The travelers who stopped to ease their hot and weary feet are not identified.

kind, "always contemplated by the early settlers of the State that the seat of government should be ultimately somewhere near the centre." Undoubtedly, he went on to say, nine-tenths of the people of the state wish for the removal. It is not improbable, he added, that within ten years the area will be the center of the population of Minnesota as well as the geographical center.

On February 27 the editor allowed himself some of the misguided certainty of many frontier dreamers: "The dilation on the inaccessibility of Kandiyohi amounts to nothing. The Pacific road will be completed to Kandiyohi in a very few months, and it is morally certain, within five years, to have direct railroad communication in all directions by the completion of roads whose construction is already begun or provided for."

Kandiyohi, the *Tribune* admitted on February 28, may be a "howling wilderness" now but predicted it would become a large city, probably within the next eight years. The area need not depend upon the state capital, the paper continued, because the townsite "has many natural advantages," which will inevitably make it an important place, after the beginning is once made." "In the beginning" was a phrase that marked creation in all of western civilization from Biblical accounts to the cities that sprang full blown from the pens of promoters and newspaper editors like Athena from the brow of Zeus. Contradicting himself, the *Tribune* writer went on to say that the new capital "will probably never be a great commercial metropolis, but such is not needed for the seat of government." After all, virtue in government can be preserved only if it is not threatened with contamination by "the 'howling mob,' politicians, lobbyists and Rings of a commercial emporium, lest they may, by their combined influence, exercise an undue influence on legislation, to the prejudice of remoter and weaker localities."

Then in the next paragraph, as with the wave of a hand, the writer dismissed all the "practical" considerations and launched into a dissertation on the "laws" governing the natural disposition of the tide of immigration which he reinforced with the principles of a Newtonian mechanistic world view and firmly founded on an unanswerable psychological "truth":

"The location of a State Capital has far more influence than many suppose in determining immigration. The tendency of population is to radiate from and circle round a center, like the planets in the solar system. The people of a State very soon come to consider the capital as the center of their system. . . . Our smart contemporaries in the Sainly City may attempt to sneer at this, but it is strictly in accordance with 'human natur' [*sic*], and all experience proves it."²²

The refuge in unalterable truth was the apogee of the *Tribune* editor's rhetoric. For the next week he retained the lofty position, all the while repeating his arguments as though mere repetition would shore up a weakening defense. It did, insofar as the bill successfully negotiated all the hurdles of the legislature. But Governor William R. Marshall vetoed the bill.²³

In spite of earlier reassurances by the *Tribune* that its editorial position was not an attack on the ambitions of the city of St. Paul, and in direct contradiction of its position relative to the reasons for locating the capital at the geographic center of the state, the editor blurted out his deepest feelings in the March 6, 1869, issue:

²²*Minneapolis Tribune*, February 28, 1869, p. 1.

²³*House Journal*, 1869, p. 194-95, 313, 377-79.

"Governor Marshall's veto of the Capitol removal bill . . . may be regarded as in itself a powerful reason why the seat of government ought to be removed from St. Paul. It bears too plainly the marks of St. Paul influence and pressure. The Governor has a great deal to say about the 'geographical center of the state.' Kandiyohi, he informs us, is only twenty miles nearer the geographical center than St. Paul. Now no man was ever crazy enough to suppose the people of Minnesota desire the capital located at the 'geographical center.' A vast region of northeastern Minnesota is almost uninhabitable for white men, and will not be populated for a thousand years. What is desired is location of the capital at the ultimate center of population. That point, according to the estimates of the citizens of the state best acquainted with its surface and resources, is Kandiyohi."

The next day (March 7) the *Tribune* commented sarcastically on the variety of statements that had appeared in the public prints on the location of the State Capitol lands. In truth, the statements were various; Kandiyohi was spotted on the map anywhere from 150 to 200 miles west of the Twin Cities. In fact, said the doughty editor, as measured on three different maps of the state, the distance from Minneapolis to the townsite was only eighty miles in a "direction a little north of west." And that for the cheering camp of those who could not see the future. On March 9 the editor took refuge in irony and a clarion call for political action:

"People have been thinking, all along that Hon. Wm. R. Marshall was elected Governor of Minnesota nearly two years ago. This, however, must be a mistake. Gov. Marshall, in his late message vetoing to the capital removal bill, plainly contradicts the public impression that he is Governor of Minnesota and writes himself down as the Governor of St. Paul. At the time of the election this, of course, was known only to the 'St. Paul Ring.' The 'outside barbarians' were allowed to suppose that they were voting for a Governor of the whole State. Gov. Marshall is entitled to our thanks for 'letting the cat out of the bag' and announcing himself as merely the Governor of St. Paul."

Now we know, said the scarred editor, and we can elect someone else to that important post in the next fall's election. He failed to note that in neither 1865 nor 1867 had William R. Marshall carried Ramsey County.²⁴ Such

mundane figures as election results, however, meant little to one who had lost something to which he had so openly been committed.

It was an all too familiar story. On March 1 the *Winona Daily Republican* summed it all up ably in a short editorial published during the senatorial debate on the bill: "The proposition, now pending in the Legislature, looking to the removal of the State capital to the howling wilderness of Kandiyohi, may serve as an excellent advertising scheme for the proprietors of 'broad acres' in that remote region, but its success in the Senate, as in the House, would be carrying the joke literally too far for the benefit of the State."

But an accurate identification of a proposition like the capital removal scheme is never enough to kill off dreams of the goose that lays the golden eggs. Statehouses, courthouses, and even railroad stations were looked upon as sure-fire producers of unearned incremental value to landed property. The question of the state capital's location was bandied about for twenty-four more years.

SO LONG as the issue of the state's boundaries remained unsettled the question of the capital probably should have remained moot. Even after the north-south shape of the state had been decided upon, the Kandiyohi County location seemed reasonable from a strictly geographical point of view. But the matter, like many matters of history, was settled by the pragmatic fact that at the time of the organization of the territory most of the people lived in and around St. Paul. The location of the capital became less and less important as communication systems kept pace with the growth and spread of the population. Still, frontier thinking, dominated by chauvinism, self-interest, and exploitation of real estate, kept the issue alive. No legislature considered turning the matter over to the people as Congress had directed.

By 1890 the main outlines of the state's demographic patterns had been established. The initial reason for selecting St. Paul as the seat of government (though that reason may have been a contributing cause of the demographic development) was still valid. Minneapolis was the major industrial city because of the power potential of the Falls of St. Anthony, and the Twin Cities area would remain the point of highest population density in the state. As a sign of the times, the legislature in 1887 added indoor toilets to the Capitol building for the comfort of state officials.²⁵ The rugged life of the frontier was coming to a close. The time for an act of confirmation had come.

At the time that the forces of the frontier were being bridled by events, the dying echoes of the *Minneapolis Tribune's* diatribe exploded with gale force. Political winds from the southland brought word of a new farmers' movement which was replacing the National

²⁴ Minnesota, *Legislative Manual*, 1883, p. 290, 292.

²⁵ Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:22.

Grange that Minnesotan Oliver H. Kelley had founded in 1867. From Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas came a farmers' organization for political action instead of education. In the Dakotas and Minnesota the favorite political maverick of the frontier, Ignatius Donnelly of Nininger, was busy organizing the Farmers' Alliance party. By 1881 there were eighty Alliance chapters in Minnesota; by 1889 the movement sent thirty-three men to the Minnesota house of representatives; by 1890 the party was a strong force that had demonstrated its power in Minnesota politics.²⁶

In December, 1890, the Farmers' Alliance party convened in St. Paul. In the midst of discussions of many larger issues, there was a heated debate on a resolution calling for the removal of the state capital to the Kandiyohi lands. It was voted down by a small margin.²⁷ The dispute now moved out of speculators' hands and was elevated to the status of a symbol for the Populist principle of the inevitable corruption of the cities. The *New London Times* put the question foursquare:

"The metropolis of New York is the city by that name, while the capital is Albany. Chicago is the metropolis of Illinois, but nevertheless the legislators do their work at Springfield. The fact that St. Paul is one of the largest and richest cities of Minnesota, instead of being viewed as a favorable circumstance, is regarded as a reason for removing the capital by the people in general."²⁸

One can almost see the furious editor of the *Litchfield Independent* angrily composing his grand statement at his type case:

"St. Paul is not the place for the capitol.

A large commercial city is no place for a state capitol, it should be located in some pleasant rural city, free from the trammels and invirons [sic] of trade and commerce, where the lawmakers can unhindered, uninfluenced [by] bub-bubs and broils of a great metropolis, legislate calmly and for the benefit of the entire state."²⁹

Amidst the Populist uproar and the "noxious air" of the now-crowded Capitol building itself, there were rumblings that made the Ramsey County delegation in the legislature most uneasy. After the secretary of the state Board of Public Health had tested the air in the senate chamber and pronounced it "utterly unfit for human beings to breathe," the old issue reared its ugly head in new garb. Senator William S. Dedon, Alliance man from Chisago County, in a move that did not fit Populist principles, offered a resolution to transfer the capital to Minneapolis. On the same day Gustavus A. Glader, Independent Republican from Kandiyohi County, offered a bill to remove the seat of government

to the "alleged City of Mennetaga."³⁰ Both attempts died in committee, but the issue once again was a matter of legislative and public controversy.

In March, 1891, Senator Frank G. McMillan, Democrat from Hennepin County, in a move that Senator William B. Dean, Republican from St. Paul, said was "like a gift from the Greeks," showed Dean a resolution requiring the appointment of a committee to investigate the need for a new building to house state officials and to report its judgment on the most desirable site for it. The proposal further stated that the next legislature, if it thought advisable, should create a commission of citizens whose responsibility should be to get on with the task. Dean and his Ramsey County colleagues suddenly developed a bad case of the shivers. Without support from the Ramsey people, McMillan put the matter before the senate.³¹

Senator Charles S. Crandall, Republican from Steele County, succeeded in having the resolution tabled. A few days later the Ramsey County delegation held a conference and decided to support the idea; they soon persuaded McMillan to offer his resolution a second time. With party support from the Republicans, the resolution passed by a vote of twenty-five to eighteen. In compliance with the directive, the president of the senate appointed McMillan, Dean, and Jay LaDue, an Alliance man from Luverne, to the thoroughly tripartisan committee. A few days later, on a motion of Senator Oscar Ayers, a Republican from Mower County, the committee was enlarged to include Ayers and Henry Keller, a Democrat from Sauk Centre.³² It would appear that in the interval the Republicans had been persuaded to take up the cudgels and reach for a decision. At any rate, the stage was set.

The committee did its work expeditiously and well. At its first meeting it agreed unanimously that a new Capitol was needed and that it should be in St. Paul. Senator Keller, whose county (Stearns) has the "Granite City" of St. Cloud as the county seat, "with an eye to business, moved that the visionary capitol shall be built entirely of Minnesota stone." There was no dissent. The

²⁶ Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics*, 1-10, 111-24 (New Haven, 1920); *The Autobiography of William Allen White*, 181-87 (New York, 1946); Blegen, *Minnesota*, 387-89.

²⁷ Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 96.

²⁸ Reprinted with no date in *The Capitol Question: A Resume of the Legislation and Work for the Removal of the Capitol to the Capitol Lands in Kandiyohi County*, 20 (Willmar, 1892).

²⁹ *The Capitol Question*, 19-20.

³⁰ Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:22-23; *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 24, 1891, p. 1 (quote).

³¹ Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:23-24.

³² Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:24-26; *Senate Journal*, 1891, p. 641-42, 746-47, 766-77, 938, 940.



WILLIAM B. DEAN



HILER H.
HORTON



JOHN B. HOMPE



PATRICK H. KELLY



IGNATIUS DONNELLY



GUSTAVUS A.
GLADER

site of the building, the committee decided, to settle the only issue in which a consensus was impossible, should be on the same Capitol Square then in use. If compelling reasons warranted a change, however, "on account of public convenience . . . the new site shall not be more than three quarters of a mile distant from the present capitol," the committee concluded. Such yeoman effort was rewarded in the usual fashion: The committee visited a few stone quarries around the state and enjoyed a pleasant junket to Des Moines to view the new Iowa State Capitol.³³

On February 3, 1893, during the twenty-eighth session of the Minnesota legislature, the committee filed both a majority and a minority report with the senate. The minority report was written by McMillan who protested the fixing of a site; he favored leaving the matter to the yet-to-be-appointed capital commission. Perhaps Dean's initial instincts had had some foundation.

The majority report followed the ideas of the committee meeting of November, 1891. The rationalization for the project was simple and quite ordinary: The new building was "necessary on the ground of proper consideration for the convenient and expeditious discharge of the public business, the care and preservation of the public records, the health and safety of the public servants, and the standing and credit of a great and prosperous commonwealth." Public business, public records, health, and, clearly, the pride of Minnesota cried out for a fine new home for the state government. The report suggested that the project be financed by a levy of two-tenths of one mill upon the assessed valuation of all property in the state for a period of two years. The impact of the proposition would be equal to an annual tax of about ten cents per eighty-acre farm, according to the committee's calculation — "an amount so insignificant that we are constrained to believe that every citizen of Minnesota would ratify your favorable action."³⁴

On the same day, February 3, Dean introduced a bill based on all the recommendations of the report to the senate. The next day Hiler H. Horton of St. Paul introduced a similar bill in the house.³⁵ The tedious preliminaries were done; the terms of the parliamentary combat were ready.

SINCE THE HOUSE was dominated by the Republican party, the St. Paul people were reasonably confident of success in that chamber. But the senate was a somewhat different story. The Republican caucus held a plurality of twenty-five votes — three short of a majority. A coalition of Democrats and Alliance men could muster twenty-nine votes (sixteen by the Democrats and thirteen by the Alliance).³⁶ The Republicans, therefore, dominated all the standing committees but were undermanned in the committee of the whole. Dean suffered, as he put it, "considerable trepidation." But, as he

reported in 1906 to the Minnesota Historical Society's annual meeting, the St. Paul delegation of the legislature pulled together manfully for "the first time within the history of Minnesota legislation." The prize, they decided, was worth the fight, for "if successful, it would forever settle the location of the seat of government, besides releasing the St. Paul delegation from the constantly recurring fears of removal, which often in times past had made it so subservient to the most unworthy demands."³⁷

The issue of removal had sometimes, if we can accept Dean's statement, been used as a cloakroom whip to threaten a rather significant block of Ramsey County votes. For better or for worse, it was an all-out campaign to settle the matter through investment rather than plebiscite.

Politics in America is a marvelous study in contrasts. The men who enter into the crisis-laden political arena are as diverse in character as any cross section of the population. Some, like Ignatius Donnelly, emit charisma that flames like a meteor. Others, like Alliance state Senator John B. Hompe of Otter Tail County, speak in words that, funneled through a consuming ideology, emerge with a roar but attract only kindred spirits. Still others, like William Dean, members of what would be called the "establishment" today and successful in their primary spheres of business, civic, and social life, run for election for a cause or as a civic duty (Dean was elected as a "Citizens' Republican" without opposition), move effectively on the issues of interest to their constituency, and then drop out of politics. And there are those who colorlessly serve their voters. Such a man was Independent Republican Gustavus A. Glader, Swedish-born farmer who served four years in the senate from Kandiyohi County, sponsored many bills that aided the farmers in his district, patiently followed through on each of his acts to the limit of the rules, and yet

³³*Minneapolis Tribune*, November 5, 1891, p. 3 ("eye to business" quote). Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:25–28 (last quote).

³⁴Both reports are quoted verbatim by Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:26–31. The two quotes in this paragraph are on pages 26 and 28.

³⁵*Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 162; *House Journal*, 1893, p. 177.

³⁶The "Official Vote by Districts and Counties. State Election held November 4, 1890," (*Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 472–73) shows the party designation of senators to be twenty Republicans, fifteen Democrats, thirteen Alliance members, three Independent Republicans, two Citizens' Republicans, and one Citizens' Democrat. Indirect evidence suggests that the "maverick" Republicans caucused with the Republican party. Glader was chairman of the committee on engrossment (see *Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 118), and Dean implied he had caucused with the Republicans. See Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:32.

³⁷Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:31–32.

seldom if ever made the newspapers as a participant in parliamentary debate. The "Capitol lands" were in his district in 1893, and he persisted in his effort to capture the state capital for his people in spite of failure to do so in the 1891 session.³⁸

On February 27, 1893, twenty-four days after Dean had introduced his bill to build a new Capitol in St. Paul, Glader introduced a bill providing for the appointment of a commission "to inspect the state capitol lands in Kandiyohi county, with a view of locating and platting a city to be called Blaine." From four to ten acres would be set aside in the city for use as a "state capitol park." The Capitol lands (other than the space reserved for the seat of government) would be offered for sale, and the proceeds would be used to pay for the erection of a new Capitol building. This proposal would be followed, he assured the *Minneapolis Tribune*, by a bill to remove the seat of government to those lands. On March 1 he introduced another bill to provide for a new statehouse in his proposed city and for a five-member commission which would begin construction after the sale of lands in the newly proposed city of Blaine had accumulated \$250,000. The cost was limited to \$2,000,000.³⁹ The Glader bills disappeared with no fanfare in the labyrinth of committees.

Although Dean's "trepidation" about opposition to his bill was enhanced by Glader's alternate proposal, he must have been encouraged by the fate of the Hiler Horton bill, similar to Dean's, in the house. Thanks to the skillful management of another St. Paul representative, Patrick H. Kelly, the Horton bill got through the house on March 17 by a vote of sixty-eight to forty-one "after one of the most prolonged and heated debates of the session." Dean wrote of Kelly that "the brunt of the fight fell upon [him]. He was equal to the occasion. By his skillful management, great energy, and happy adaptability, he won friends for the measure from all parties, and it is not too much to say that to him, more than to any other person, we are indebted for the success that has forever settled the question of the location of the capitol of the state of Minnesota."⁴⁰

The *St. Paul Daily Pioneer Press* of March 17 gleefully commented: "The only other weapon left the opponents of the bill was the adoption of the calamity howl, and so completely did Mr. [William A.] Fleming [of

Crow Wing County] assimilate his arguments with the Populist stump doctrines that he was openly complimented by Mr. [Hans P.] Bjorge, the Otter Tail Populist, upon his 'sound principles.' This was gall and wormwood to Mr. Fleming who is a staunch Republican."

Now it was up to Dean to put together enough votes in the senate to complete the victory. Dean's bill came out of committee after Glader's Kandiyohi statehouse bill, but the committee on finance recommended that the latter be "indefinitely postponed." Glader immediately moved that his bill be put on general orders — that is, set aside (but kept alive, or so its supporters hoped) for later discussion and a vote. But that was not to be. Although the last-gasp move was approved and, later in the day, routinely given a second reading, nothing more was heard of the Glader bill. It just died.⁴¹

On April 4, 1893, Horton's version of the St. Paul Capitol bill (as amended and approved by the house) was brought for opening floor debate before the senate sitting as a committee of the whole. Dean, sponsor of the senate version, presented the Horton bill to his colleagues. In his opinion it was imperfect, but he felt that "it would be dangerous to amend the bill at this late date and send it back to the House." Then he talked at length about the economic advantages it would bring to the steel milling and stone industries and other businesses around the state.⁴²

John B. Hompe, Alliance senator from Otter Tail County, led the charge against the bill. According to the *St. Paul Dispatch* of April 5, he argued that it was "extremely injudicious to press this measure at this time when the poor farmers and the dwellers in the sod shanties of the far West are struggling to be relieved from the already oppressive burden of taxation." With wheat at fifty cents a bushel and business in a state of depression, it behooved the legislature to remember the Republicans' early-session promises to economize on state expenditures. Then, in a stroke that must have made the Ramsey County delegation wince, Hompe, according to the *Dispatch*, put in the record the argument that outstaters were opposed to the bill but that St. Paul urbanites were "alarmed and are making extravagant efforts to have a new and permanent capitol."

Senator James McHale, Democrat from Scott County, responded cynically that such a person as described by Hompe would find his "share of the capitol tax . . . equivalent . . . to the price of a stick of gum annually." Senator Donnelly, Alliance leader from Dakota County, reportedly said that he "did not intend to vote for the bill but he believed a new capitol would be needed before the end of ten years." By that time, he said, there would be at least 2,000,000 inhabitants in the state so the cost of the project would be only \$1.00 per capita. Why not, he asked, wait till then?

³⁸ *Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 427, 572, 575; Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 74, 290.

³⁹ *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 299, 319; *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 28, 1893, p. 2 (quotes), March 2, 1893, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *St. Paul Daily Pioneer Press*, March 17, 1893, p. 1 (first quote); *House Journal*, 1893, p. 533, 538–39; Dean, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:32.

⁴¹ *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 571.

⁴² *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 693–94; *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 5, 1893, p. 2 (quote).

Senator William W. Mayo of Olmsted County, according to a newspaper report, "made a vigorous speech" in favor of the measure, "not out of feeling for St. Paul but for the pressing need of the state." The founder of the Mayo Clinic was serving his first term in the senate and, as a Democrat supporting a Republican bill, was proving to be unresponsive to party discipline. If the Democrats seemed to be splitting on the issue, the Alliance people were not doing much better. In spite of Donnelly's leadership and Hompe's polemics, an Alliance man from Luverne — Jay LaDue — was outspoken in his support of the measure. LaDue's trotting mare, Polly, held the world four-mile record at ten minutes, five seconds, and perhaps the fact that he had been bemedaled by the Russian czar for his efforts in "improving the breed" had tainted his Populism with a smear of aristocracy. Senator Dean, in an effort to stanch the "bleeding farmer syndrome," pointed out that Ramsey County paid one-fourth of all the taxes of the state and Hennepin County paid one-third. Between them the Twin Cities would pay for more than one-half the cost of the new building. He then moved to suspend the rules and consider the bill for final passage. The motion was defeated, the vote falling seven short of the thirty-six ayes needed, so the bill was sent to the senate finance committee.⁴³

That committee, composed of out-state Republicans and one St. Paul Democrat and chaired by Senator Charles S. Crandall, a Republican from Steele County, acted on the bill the next day, April 5. It was returned to the floor with a recommendation to pass. Later in the morning the senate, sitting in committee of the whole, recommended that Glader's bill for founding the town of Blaine be passed.⁴⁴ It was a hollow victory: The real moment for the senate to fish or cut bait would arrive the next day.

The Dean-Horton proposal came on the floor for final debate in the afternoon of April 6. Hompe again led the opposition. He "denied that these cities pay over one-half of the taxes of the state. The wholesale merchants do not pay the taxes nominally credited to them; they are taxed against the farmers when the goods are sold to retailers, and the country eventually pays it." It was eighteenth-century physiocratic economic principle clothed in Populist phrases; the farmer is the only producer of wealth in the economy, and businessmen are parasites. Hompe went on to imply that unethical methods had been employed in advancing the interests of the bill and that the people of Minnesota would never stand for such illicit activity.⁴⁵ We can only wonder at the passion of his Populist rhetoric and his sense of corruption (maybe one and the same) which seemed to have forced his arguments into a totally negative cast; he never used Glader's proposals as a positive alternative to the Dean-Horton proposition.

Senator Silas W. Leavitt, Democrat from Litchfield, Meeker County, now took up the argument. Claiming that the whole matter was a conspiracy engineered by the St. Paul delegation, Leavitt said: "There are today 111 petitions from 43 counties, with thousands of signers, in the hands of the chairman of the committee on finance, protesting against the passage of this bill, all from the agricultural part of the state." Such powerful sentiments of the people were being ignored, he maintained, because the St. Paul delegation was grimly determined to keep the capital at any cost. He railed against the unsuccessful try of April 4 to suspend the rules and keep the bill out of the finance committee as an attempt to rub salt into "the bleeding aching backs of the people who are to pay this money."⁴⁶

According to the *Tribune* of April 7, Leavitt claimed that one citizen of Ramsey County had threatened to defeat certain bills that he, Leavitt, felt were essential to the welfare of the people. The newspaper also quoted the Litchfield legislator as follows: "There is a strong feeling throughout the state that our capitol and our law makers should be removed from the influence of the city of St. Paul, and such proceedings as I have related will go far to confirm this opinion in the minds of the people." It was a desperate matter for St. Paul, Leavitt said, because "Once remove the capital from this city, and there will not be enough of it left to hold a tallow dip for Minneapolis and Duluth to grow by."

The St. Paul people refrained from replying because they believed that the die was cast and any kind of answer to Leavitt would probably antagonize someone. Donnelly argued that it was to the best interest of his county to keep St. Paul the capital, but he felt that the interest of the state demanded another location. He also thought the whole issue was premature. He needled Leavitt a little by saying that the Litchfield senator "had an unpleasant disposition to stick pins in people." Donnelly thought the issue as good as done and the bill carried, the *Tribune* said, but he would nevertheless stick to his guns and vote no.

When the question was called for, the bill passed

⁴³ *St. Paul Daily Pioneer Press*, April 5, 1893, p. 1 (McHale quote); *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 5, 1893, p. 2 (Donnelly quote); *St. Paul Dispatch*, April 5, 1893, p. 5 (Mayo quote); Jay LaDue to Cass Gilbert, January 7, 1896, in Cass Gilbert Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society; *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 693-94.

⁴⁴ *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 394, 413, 707, 839-40. For the composition of the committee on finance see the *Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 118. The committee apparently acted affirmatively over Chairman Crandall's opposition. He voted against passage in the final vote while all the other members voted for passage.

⁴⁵ *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 719-20; *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 7, 1893, p. 2 (quote).

⁴⁶ *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 7, 1893, p. 2 (quote).

thirty-four to twenty. No senator was absent from his seat.⁴⁷

AN ANALYSIS of the vote shows the senate to have behaved in the best tradition of Minnesota politics: There was only a modicum of party discipline as well as a healthy number of just plain mavericks. Nineteen Republicans, nine Democrats, and three Alliance men voted for the measure. Seven Democrats, seven Alliance men, five Republicans, and one Independent Republican voted against it. If the Democratic-Alliance coalition could have held its two votes in Minneapolis, the votes of the three Alliance districts in the southwest corner of the state, and those of the two Democratic districts immediately northwest of Kandiyohi County, the measure would have been defeated. But the coalition could not do what had to be done. Furthermore, Lorenzo G. Wood, Alliance senator from Joe Rolette's old district in northwestern Minnesota, remained true to tradition and voted for St. Paul. Two other Populists — Orrin Mott of Lincoln County and H. C. Nelson of Freeborn County — also bolted the fold. But the Republicans dropped some key votes, too. Charles S. Crandall of Steele County opposed the measure all the way. John W. Peterson, Goodhue County Republican, was apparently affected by the proximity of Ignatius Donnelly and voted against his own party. Three other Republicans who voted against the party leaders were Christopher D. Guderian, representing Anoka and Isanti counties; Thomas O. Streissguth of Sibley County; and Ole O. Canestrop, representing Big Stone, Grant, Stevens, and Traverse counties. The vote was a decisive victory for St. Paul as the seat of government and for the Ramsey County delegation, but it demonstrated little about any party's power.⁴⁸

The parliamentary battle was over. It was "Now to the Gov.," as a *Minneapolis Tribune* headline read on April 7, 1893. Since Governor Knute Nelson's signature had been promised, Senator Dean could at last relax his fears. And Senator Hompe's prediction came true. By the time Minnesota had spent \$2,000,000 for a new State Capitol, St. Paulites could forget the frightening specter of removal.

Although legislative decisions decide, they do not necessarily convince. If the prospect of profit died hard, the thwarting of principle by statute barely slowed the

breath. The Populists played out the string to the bitter end. In 1896, even as the Board of Capitol Commissioners was proceeding with land purchases and the selection of its architect, attorney John F. Kelly of St. Paul filed a request for an injunction against the board on behalf of Swan J. Fleckten of the town of Kandiyohi and thirteen others. On February 6, 1897, Judge William C. Williston of the First Judicial District in St. Paul refused the complaint on the grounds that it did not "state facts sufficient to institute a cause of action."⁴⁹

This decision was appealed to the state Supreme Court and heard in the April term of 1897. The court's decision, written by Justice Thomas Canty, read in part: "Neither is there anything in counsel's position that this law provides for a permanent capitol at the temporary seat of government. Section 1, art. 15, of the constitution does not make St. Paul the temporary, but the permanent, seat of government until removed to Kandiyohi county by the legislature, or to some other place by the legislature and a vote of the people. Nothing of the kind has been done to remove it."⁵⁰

THUS THE simple logic of political history ended the argument. Decades of frontier freewheeling and flaming political rhetoric had provided only pyrotechnical displays for the periodic amusement and gratification of the citizenry. The demographic patterns of Minnesota had been provided a pivot around which to develop before the state was created: The establishment of Fort Snelling close to the head of navigation of the Mississippi River furnished the focal point for early settlement and for its extension toward the natural resources of the region. Political boundaries had funneled settlers up the great river road and debouched them over the prairies and forests from St. Paul. All the "boomers" and all the Populists were as nothing before the gale of fact. In the end, Donnelly was probably more right than he knew: The issue was never really in doubt. St. Paul was the capital of Minnesota. The appropriation of \$2,000,000 only squelched the caterwauling; history had determined the real issue.

In political affairs there are always loose ends that need to be tidied up. The capital issue was no exception. Glader's bill came before the senate on April 15, 1893, almost the last day of the session. "There was no debate upon the Glader 'City of Blaine' bill . . ." read a newspaper account. "It was peremptorily killed." The vote was twelve ayes and twenty-one nays.⁵¹

In 1901 the last loose string was snipped off in the state capital matter that had given Dean and his associates so much uneasiness. At the direction of the thirty-third legislature, State Auditor Robert C. Dunn held a public sale of the Kandiyohi Capitol lands in the city of Willmar on August 15, 1901. The legislation had remarkable support even from the county's citizens.

⁴⁷*Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 719-20.

⁴⁸*Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 719-20; *Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 472-73, 564-77.

⁴⁹Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 96.

⁵⁰Minnesota Supreme Court, *Reports*, 69:191 (June 16, 1897, November 5, 1897).

⁵¹*Minneapolis Tribune*, April 7, 1893, p. 2 (quote); *Senate Journal*, 1893, p. 839-40.

Apparently the political doctrinaires gave up the battle, and the farmers, who had been leasing and farming the land since the legislature authorized their doing so in 1891, wanted to secure title to the property. The ten sections sold for an average price of \$19.62 an acre and realized "the handsome sum of \$125,482.50." According to the historians of the county, "Most of the lands were purchased by the former renters." They are still being farmed.⁵²

William B. Dean, initiator and master strategist of the bill that made St. Paul the permanent capital by investment rather than plebiscite, did not run again for the senate in 1894. He was succeeded by Edward H. Ozmun, a railroad lawyer and a Republican. Dean was a one-term senator.⁵³

⁵²Minnesota, *General Laws*, 1901, p. 230-32; Minnesota, *Executive Documents*, 1902, 1:34 (first quote); Lawson and Tew, *Kandiyohi County*, 96 (second quote). The legislature directed that the "proceeds arising from such sales shall be credited to the general revenue fund, for the purpose of completing the public buildings or for the erection of others, at the seat of government. . . ." There is nothing to indicate that the money was used to build the present Capitol in St. Paul.

⁵³*Legislative Manual*, 1895, p. 475.

THE PHOTOGRAPH of the Capitol approach on page 238 is by Alan Ominsky. All other photographs are in the society's picture collection.





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