



SURVEYING THE SEASONS ON THE MINNESOTA PRAIRIES

L. R. MOYER
OF MONTEVIDEO

Edmund C. Bray

THE "SHOWY PRAIRIE" flowers are gone, and even the grasses have been mostly destroyed. Along the roadsides and on railroad rights-of-way a few individuals of the original flora are still to be found. No ecological survey of this region, conducted according to modern ecological methods, has ever been made, and it does not seem possible to make such a survey now.¹

These statements, which seem so modern today, were part of a paper read before the Minnesota Academy of Science in 1910. The region referred to was that of the upper Minnesota River, and the author was not only a nationally known amateur botanist but also a surveyor, banker, historian, poet, politician, and the "most prominent citizen" of the western Minnesota town of Montevideo. Who was this man, so typical in many respects of pioneer civic leaders, yet so unusual in his contributions as an amateur botanist?²

Lycurgus Rose Moyer was born in Niagara County, New York, on October 29, 1848. Nothing of his life is known until he was 14, when the first of his four surviving diaries (dated 1863, 1866, 1869, and 1884)

¹The author and the editors wish to thank Marjorie Fader and Mrs. Clarence Ostle of the Chippewa County Historical Society (CCHS), Montevideo, for their generous assistance. L. R. Moyer, "The Prairie Flora of Southwestern Minnesota," in both Minnesota Academy of Science, *Bulletin*, 4:357-372 (1906-1910) and L. R. Moyer and O. G. Dale, eds., *History of Chippewa and Lac qui Parle Counties, Minnesota*, 1:68-86 (Indianapolis, 1916). The term "oecology," now "ecology," was first introduced by Ernst Haeckel in 1886, see Eug. Warming *et al.*, *Oecology of Plants: An Introduction to the Study of Plant Communities*, 1a (London, 1925).

²Montevideo *Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5.

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recorded the development of interests he would pursue throughout his life.³

The little book written in 1863 revealed a hard-working farm boy with a strong intellectual bent, living in Cambria, New York. Early in the year he attended the lyceum, where "they put my name on to speak" a piece. A few days later he went to the nearby town of Lockport with his father to buy a philosophy book. In March his interest in nature appeared with references to bird sightings. An attitude of superiority that was to affect his later political career was already noticeable when he wrote "The Girls & Boys Have a great notion they are everything[,] while [they are] only Girls and boys." During May the first of his surviving verses appeared on the last Sunday in the month, probably in rebellion against religious restraints:

Yo[u]r preachers lead your souls astray
For nature knows no Sab[b]ath day.⁴

On a Sunday in April, 1866, Moyer, then 17, recorded in his diary: "Stayed around the house. Studdyed [sic] Botany. Analyzed a Liverleaf (Hepatica Trilobe)." A few days later he was trimming the peach orchard and grafting. These youthful entries foretold his interest in two aspects of nature study that were to dominate his entire life, although there is no record of his ever having formally studied either botany or horticulture. On one day in May, he analyzed several flowers, giving scientific as well as common names: trillium; a peach, *Amygdalus Persica*; yellow adder's-tongue, *Erythronium americanum*. In the course of his "botanizing," Moyer spoke of such plants as blue star grass, *Iris*, a high-bush cranberry, *Rosa dianthus*, and a species of *Helianthemum* (rock-rose). He was struck by the sight of "a beautiful red bird

in the woods," noting that it was probably a scarlet tanager, the "First I ever saw."⁵

Meanwhile he became an active debater, joined a literary association, started writing for the school newspaper, frequently read the *Atlantic Monthly*, studied algebra, and "fixed an ark [sic] to the barometer. It measures degrees." In the fall his studies included algebra, bookkeeping, and chemistry. During these years he attended a district school and the Lockport high school.

In 1869, at the age of 20, Moyer wrote that he was teaching school but that he was frequently sick. He had contracted diphtheria in 1863, boils in 1866, and frequently referred to smallpox and cholera in the region. By the spring of 1869 he had to give up teaching because of his health. The cause of his illness was believed to be a too-fervent devotion to his studies. During his recuperation he found time to read the history of the Reformation. On the first day of the year he had "worked a few examples in surveying," providing the first indication of his interest in engineering. As spring weather lured him back to botany, he filled his diaries with plant identifications.⁶

Moyer's journals betrayed considerable disenchantment with organized religion as early as 1866; by 1869 things had not much improved. On Sunday, May 30, for example, he wrote: "Went to Sanborn to meeting in the P.M. This is a new start. I had not been to church before since last January." The next Sunday, after studying surveying and botany and playing ball in the morning, he returned to the church at Sanborn in the afternoon, where he heard a "Sermon in . . . 'Spurious' religion. I suppose I am 'spurious.'" Nevertheless, he attended the new Bible class. "It promises to be interesting. If it is it will be the first one." Then on Sunday, July 4, he exclaimed to his diary: "Wicked! With a Compass and Chain surveyed the potatoes and then (wicked!!) went over in the woods botanizing and picking strawberries. Went in Swimming. At Sunday School in Mr. Telford's Bible class but he was absent."

After several attempts to persuade his family to sell the farm, the young Lycurgus observed on May 13, "The Pacific R.R. is completed. I shall go west." On October 11, 1869, he "bought a second class ticket for La Crosse[e], Wis. [via Detroit and Milwaukee]. Started from the bridge on the 12:30 Lightning Express." Like many of his contemporaries he was going west on the advice of his doctor to regain his health.⁷

From La Crosse he traveled on the steamboat "Canada" to Prescott, Wisconsin, a "forlorn looking town," and then on the little "Nellie Kent" to Hudson, Wisconsin, where he visited his cousin Charles and his family. He was quite impressed with Charles's daughter Mary, a teacher: not only did she have "an excellent education," she also understood botany. "She is the first Botanist I ever met." From Hudson he made a trip across Lake St.

³ Lee Brothers Historical Collection of Portraits of Prominent Citizens (hereafter cited as Lee Collection), Lycurgus R. Moyer, in audio-visual library, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). See also Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912*, 530 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14, 1912).

⁴ Lycurgus Moyer, Diary, February 11, 21, March 4, 19, 20, 24, May 31, 1863; all the Moyer diaries cited, here and below, are in the CCHS.

⁵ Here and below, see Moyer, Diary, January 15, April 22, 27, May 6, 23, June 3, 10, 24, 25, July 29, August 26, September 9, 22, December 23, 31, 1866; *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5. Botanical references throughout this article follow Merritt L. Fernald, ed., *Gray's Manual of Botany* (8th ed., New York, 1970).

⁶ Here and below, see Moyer, Diary, January 1, 4, 26, 27, February 1, 12, 25, May 7, 19, 31, June 1, 2, 4, 6, 12, 17, August 14, 1869; *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5.

⁷ Here and two paragraphs below, see Moyer, Diary, May 9, October 14, 15, 17, 18, November 12, 1869; Moyer and Dale, eds., *History of Chippewa County*, 1:371. The botany book was probably Alphonso Wood, *The Class Book of Botany* (New York, 1860, 1864, or 1865).

Croix to Afton, Minnesota, where after an examination and an interview with the superintendent of schools for Washington County, he was hired to teach near Lake-land, "a half-mile from the lake."

On October 29 he noted: "Read considerable.

But the most interesting book is Woods Botany." The day before he had observed, "The beautiful rolling prairies of Wisconsin make an eastern farmer disgusted with his poor land." Moyer was soon to see a great deal of prairie and indeed to live amidst it for the rest of his life. On December 31 he summarized the year, reflecting, "It may be that I should not have come west had I been well. Still[,] looking back doesn't pay." He had seen evidence of the much-touted western health benefits on a November visit to the home of the St. Croix County, Wisconsin, surveyor. He noted in his diary that the man "says that when he came to this country he was as thin and spare as I am. Now he is as lusty as [can be]." Indeed, no mention is made of Moyer's suffering from further illnesses.

After a winter of teaching, he went in March of 1870 to Duluth, where he worked on the construction of the new St. Paul and Duluth Railroad. He managed to stand "close to the superintendent when he drove the last spike." While working for the railroad he met Philander B. Pettijohn, who "often told me that summer about his father's mill at Chippewa City." Moyer decided to see for himself.⁸

HE headed west in August, taking the train from St. Paul to the end of the line at the four-week-old Minnesota town of Benson. Moyer walked to the confluence of the Chippewa and the Minnesota rivers. Chippewa City was a young settlement of six buildings on the west bank of the Chippewa. On the east bank, where Moyer stood, he could see two completed buildings — a cabin on the site of which he was later to establish a bank, and a larger building, both of which he described in detail. One was "an unoccupied log house covered with oak 'shakes'"; the other, "a double log house, one end of which was one story high and covered with bark, the other being a

story-and-a-half high and covered with hand-cut shingles." This building consisted of two rooms, each 16 feet square. In the one-storied end was the hotel, boasting a wooden floor; in the other end were the general store, the land office, and the office of the clerk of the district court. "In the loft over the store, the [hotel] guests were stored away." Under construction nearby were two small frame buildings.⁹

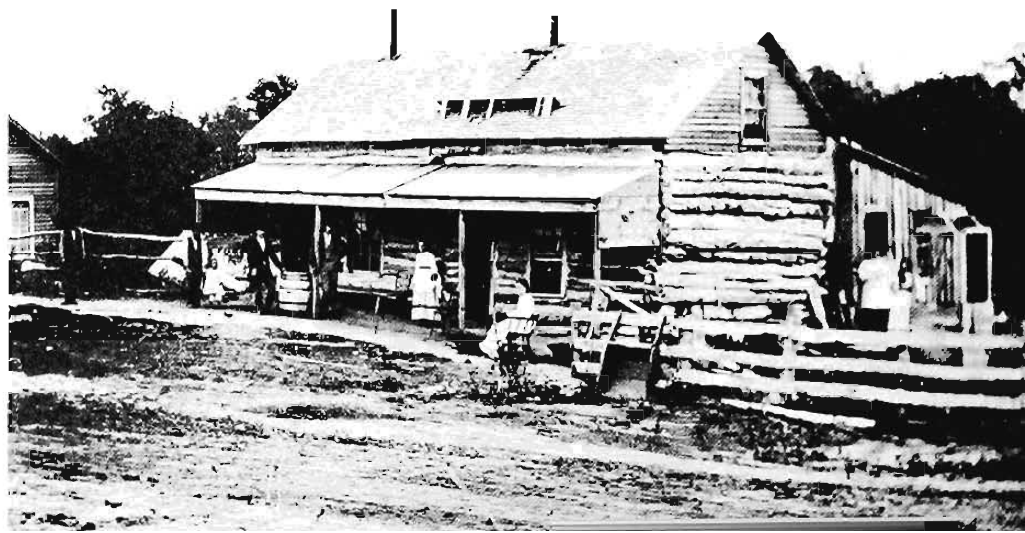
Moyer arrived at this embryonic seat of Chippewa County on August 10, 1870, later recalling, "I knew the place to be Montevideo at once." The next day, the sawmill Philander Pettijohn had told him about was moved from Chippewa City to the new settlement on the east bank. Montevideo, the new county seat, was on its way. It soon completely overshadowed the earlier settlement, which did not even appear on the 1874 county map.

Barely a month after his arrival Moyer started what was to be one of his major civic activities for almost 50 years: he made a loan to a new settler. Five years later he and Charles H. Budd formed the firm of Budd & Moyer. The partnership combined a "Law, Real Estate & Collection Office" with continued banking activity. In 1877, the partners joined with Moyer's brother, Lloyd G., who had arrived in Montevideo that year, to form

⁸ Unfortunately, no diaries for the years from 1870 to 1883 have been found, so the account of Moyer's early life in Montevideo must be drawn from his published recollections, apparently based on diaries now lost, and from other sources; Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:371. Eli Pettijohn, one of the pioneer settlers of Chippewa City, started a sawmill and a grist mill there; later in California he developed the well-known Pettijohn cereal. See *Montevideo Historical Album and Centennial Program Book*, 3 (Montevideo, 1971).

⁹ Here and below, see Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:372-374; A. T. Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*, 177 (Chicago, 1874). Montevideo's name is supposed to have been derived from the "Mount I See"; see *Montevideo Historical Album*, 3; Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance*, 104 (Reprint ed., St. Paul, 1969). Smith's Addition to Montevideo includes Chippewa City.

THE LOG HOTEL, Montevideo's principal building about 1870 when Moyer first saw it





THE YOUNG Moyer, pictured in the *Andreas atlas* of 1874

the Chippewa County Bank. L. R. Moyer was president of the then Chippewa County State Bank at the time of his death in 1917.¹⁰

Lycurgus had found time to read law "during the long winters and quiet summers of the early seventies."

¹⁰ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:308, 392, 2:54; *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5. C. H. Budd was also from Niagara County, New York. He later married L. R. Moyer's sister, Cornelia Margaret, who "worked in the bank when few women did," according to their son, Raymond Budd, quoted in James McKoew, "Budd Building Accepted in National Register of Historic Places," an unattributed clipping in CCHS. In 1908 the bank was reincorporated as the Chippewa County State Bank.

¹¹ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:194, 388.

¹² Lee Collection; *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5; interview with Frank Austin of Montevideo, August 4, 1981, transcript in CCHS. Waldo Emerson and John Burroughs died young, aged 22 and 16, respectively.

¹³ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:376; Lee Collection; *Montevideo Directory*, 1901, in CCHS.

¹⁴ *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5; Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:195, 376, 379, 383; "Survey of Wood Lake Battlefield, by W. A. Truesdell, L. R. Moyer, and Robt. Watson, Oct. 22, 1871," in Map of the Camp Battleground at Wood Lake Papers, MHS; Moyer, Diary, May 21, June 6, 10, 1884; Austin interview, August 7, 1981, notes in author's possession. For information on Truesdell, see his obituary in Association of Engineering Societies, *Journal*, 42:369-371 (June, 1909).

and was admitted to the bar in 1875. He soon found the practice of trial law "rather distasteful" and, after appearing in a trial or two, gave up court practice but continued to be active in other legal matters. Two years after Moyer's admission to the bar Governor John S. Pillsbury appointed him to fill the vacant position of judge of probate for Chippewa County. He was repeatedly re-elected, serving in that position for nearly 20 years.¹¹

With roots in both the banking and legal professions well planted, Moyer established his domestic life. On July 19, 1876, he married Anna Lizzie Wightman at Mauston, Wisconsin; they were to have six children. The names of the first three boys reflected the high-mindedness of the parents: Sumner Livingston, Waldo Emerson, and John Burroughs. The fourth son, Amos Franklin, was named for his grandfather; the two girls were Katherine Cornelia and Rose Elizabeth. Sumner, the eldest, continued his father's activities as bank president; he was destined to lose everything but the family mansion when the bank failed in the depression of the 1930s.¹²

In addition to banking and the law, Moyer had "learned something about surveying by reading books on the art." He had brought a surveyor's compass with him from the East, and soon after his arrival at Montevideo he surveyed a land claim for Hubert Haubris, a neighboring settler. On October 8, 1870, he surveyed the first county road, from the Chippewa River east to Black Oak Lake. On this road, which came to be known as Black Oak Avenue, he later built a home at number 201 and a larger house, number 117, where he was to live for the rest of his life.¹³

In 1872 he was elected and subsequently re-elected county surveyor, serving in that position for 30 years. Both in that capacity and independently he spent much time in the field. In October, 1870, barely a month after his arrival, he had drawn a plat of the village of Montevideo; a year later he measured the townsite of Lac qui Parle. That autumn he and civil engineer William Albert Truesdell surveyed the site of a battle in the 1862 Dakota War. When Moyer later measured "through sloughs and mud the town line between Lac qui Parle & Cerro Gordo" townships, he felt like exclaiming ironically, as Truesdell once had, "Who would not be a surveyor." He contracted to do township and railroad surveys as far west as Montana. A June, 1884, diary entry says he "took contract to survey a new town site, on the M. & S.L. [Minneapolis and St. Louis] RR"; elsewhere Moyer remembered doing similar work for the Winona and St. Peter Railroad.¹⁴

AS HE criss-crossed the countryside he thoroughly familiarized himself with midwestern flora. Reading "The Prairie Flora of Southwestern Minnesota," a paper he presented in 1910 and later published as a chapter of a

Chippewa County history, one can experience the seasonal changes of the prairies as Moyer did for 40 years. Naming nearly 400 species of trees, shrubs, and plants, the paper shows his mastery of the scientific approach and terminology; it also makes evident his interest in Indian and frontier uses of various plants and his aesthetic appreciation of the flora.¹⁵

What at first appears to be merely a catalog of the species evident in eight topographical areas — the high rolling prairies, the sloughs, the prairie meadows, the alkali flats, the valley, the bluffs, the rocks, and the bogs — comes to life on careful reading. Moyer emphasized the varying beauty of the landscape as the seasons advance and the ever-changing combination of blossoms, adding knowledgeable comments about particular species.

"With the opening of spring the first plant to attract the attention of the traveler would [be] the pasque flower, *Pulsatilla hirsutissima* as we have been in the habit of calling it, or *Anemone patens wolfgangia*, if we are bound by the Vienna agreement," Moyer wrote. This flower "opens its pale lilac petals early in April on dry ground everywhere, and is almost equally conspicuous later on in its fruiting stage when it flings to the breeze its silvery silken styles." Also in April "*Ranunculus rhomboideus* [prairie buttercup] is found opening its golden petals low down among the gray grasses of the previous year. At about the same time of year the diminutive *Carex pennsylvanica* [Pennsylvania sedge] is seen blooming everywhere." Early in May in the Minnesota Valley, "The pasque flower is common on bench lands, and on lower levels . . . *Anemone caroliniana* [Carolina anemone], the most beautiful of spring flowers, opens its pale blue and white petals."¹⁶

As spring turned to summer, a perhaps undecorative but highly useful prairie species made its appearance. "On the high rolling prairies, *Psoralea esculenta* [prairie turnip] sends up its spreading bushy tops, villous with whitish hairs, bearing spikes of bluish flowers. This plant has a deep, farinaeous root and was called 'pomme-de-terre' by the French frontiersmen, and it was from the abundance of this plant along its sandy banks that the Pomme de Terre river took its name. By the Sioux Indians, this plant was called Teepsenee, and it was their principal food plant. One who chose to follow an Indian trail in the early days was sure to find, wherever the Indians had camped, a great pile of these thickened roots from which the edible central part had been extracted. These roots are rich in starch and have a pleasant flavor. I do not know that any attempt has ever been made to cultivate this plant. Perhaps it would take too many years to get a crop." Elsewhere Moyer comments, "It is said the Indians dried it [the pomme-de-terre] and made it into flour which was used for thickening soups and for other purposes. The young men who followed the early

breaking plows on the western Minnesota prairies can testify that the roots were very good eaten raw."¹⁷

Moyer's descriptive calendar moved to early July when "the grayness of the prairies due to *Amorpha* [lead plant] and *Psoraleas* [discussed on page 80] is heightened by the whitening plumes of the ripening porcupine grass, *Stipa spartea*. The loosening seed grains, with their long spiral awns, work through one's clothing and irritate one's flesh. . . . The Canada milk vetch, *Astragalus canadensis*, becomes a conspicuous object where the soil has been loosened by the pocket gopher."

Continuing through the prairie summer, Moyer noted that "In the early part of August the tall stems and purple spikes of the big, bluestem grass, *Andropogon furcatus* [now *A. Gerardii*], are conspicuous objects on rich moist prairies. Indeed, one who has seen this noble grass in great areas growing on the wild prairie, especially if he has seen it in full bloom in the early morning,

AN EARLY spring pasque flower



¹⁵ Here and below, see Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:68–86. The author counted the number of references to different species.

¹⁶ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:72, 80. The International Association of Botanists held what has become known as "The Second Congress" (of the 20th century) at Vienna in June, 1905. It established a new set of rules for botanical nomenclature. See Richard C. Starr, ed., *XI International Botanical Congress Proceedings*, 14 (Washington, D.C., 1970).

¹⁷ Here and six paragraphs below, see Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:73, 74, 76, 77, 79, 84, 89. Another interpretation of the Sioux name for prairie turnip is tipsinna, see Edmund C. Bray and Martha C. Bray, trans. and eds., *Joseph N. Nicollet on the Plains and Prairies. The Expeditions of 1838–39 With Journals, Letters, and Notes on the Dakota Indians*, 51 (St. Paul, 1976).

swaying before a gentle south wind, will have impressed on his mind a sight never to be forgotten." During the same month common smartweed or "*Polygonum emer-sum* shows its dense rose-colored spikes in the deeper sloughs. This last mentioned plant when touched by the autumnal frosts gives forth a spicy fragrance" always remembered "by one who has once inhaled it." Another midsummer plant of the bluffs and high rolling prairies was purple coneflower. "known to old frontiersmen as thirst weed. Its gray-colored, thickened roots were used by early travelers as an antidote for thirst. Taken into the mouth, it has a salty, peppery taste, increasing the flow of saliva so that the weary traveler forgets that there is no good drinking water to be had."

Moyer's seasonal almanac said that the "only gentian common on the autumnal prairie is the *Gentiana puberula* [downy gentian], and it opens its blue flowers very late, sometimes blooming even in October, when the prairie grasses have taken on the brown tints due to frost. The prairie is now whitened with *Aster multiflorus* [now *A. ericoides*, heath aster] and its allies."

But the more than 100 species of flowering plants identified by Moyer on the prairies were not always enough to relieve the monotony of a long journey across the vast landscape. "It has been said," he wrote, "that the prairie flora is deficient in species but rich in individual plants." He could not but agree. Since only a portion of the 100 species would be in bloom at one time, they could seem few and far between during days of travel, and even a botanist like himself "becomes weary of the endless repetition of individuals" and "comes out with a sense of relief upon a broad river valley such as . . . the Minnesota."

THE OFTEN PLEASANT combination of surveying and "botanizing" in the field were only a part of Moyer's busy life in western Minnesota, however. His services as a civil engineer were in constant demand in town as well: for the village of Montevideo he served on a committee on bridges, investigated street sprinkling, and was appointed superintendent of cemeteries. For Chippewa



MONTEVIDEO in 1880, showing Moyer's bank and above it the law offices of his partner, Charles Budd

County he examined specifications and plans for the new courthouse and jail. Governor William R. Merriam appointed him a commissioner to appraise school and state lands.¹⁸

Scattered items from his diary of 1884, the last of the four that survive, show that at 35 he continued to develop the wide intellectual interests of the farm boy of 14. Botanical entries occur more and more frequently. "Gertrude, Sumner & I made a botanical expedition down to Cedar Lake. A very pleasant time. Several flowers analyzed. . . . A botanical trip after Bank closed too cold for comfort. . . . Probably the last botanical excursion of the season."¹⁹

In addition to what must have been a heavy schedule as a lawyer, banker, surveyor, and botanist, Moyer found time to engage in a wide spectrum of activities — intellectual, religious, fraternal, civic, and political. When a Chautauqua circle formed in Montevideo, he participated in its study groups and readings; he also lectured there on subjects as diverse as "Romans in Britain" and "Biology." Having often been taken for a native of Norway when he first arrived in the West, Moyer pursued his intellectual development by taking a Norwegian class in 1884, perhaps with an eye to potential customers and constituents among the many Norwegians in the area. His May 13 entry reads, "Left the Chautauqua Circle early to go to hear Arctander speak in Norsk on the Politiske Forehold i Norge [*Political Conditions in Norway*]" ; there follows a notation in accurate Norwegian about a collection that was taken for the use of Norway's Liberal Party (*Venstre Foreningen*). The diary does not reveal whether Moyer felt impelled to contribute.²⁰

Though a staunch member of the local Congregational church, Moyer brought a truly ecumenical spirit to his church attendance, revealing in his diary his presence at a three-day camp meeting at Big Stone Lake as well as

¹⁸ See, for example, Montevideo Village Council Minutes, November 8, 1882, March 26, May 5, 1890, April 16, 1900, all in Montevideo City Hall; Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:180; *Montevideo Leader*, November 13, 1891, p. 8.

¹⁹ Moyer, *Diary*, May 18, 29, October 18, 1884. Gertrude was probably Moyer's sister-in-law, who lived with the family at various times.

²⁰ Moyer, *Diary*, November 1, 1869, March 2, April 15, 29, 1884. The state census of 1895 shows that Norwegians composed the major portion of Montevideo's foreign-born population; *Montevideo Leader*, March 20, 1896, p. 5. The speaker was probably Minneapolis Norwegian-American lawyer Ino. W. Arctander; see Carl G. O. Hansen, *My Minneapolis . . . the Norwegians in Minneapolis Through One Hundred Years*, 34, 62, 259 (Minneapolis, 1956).

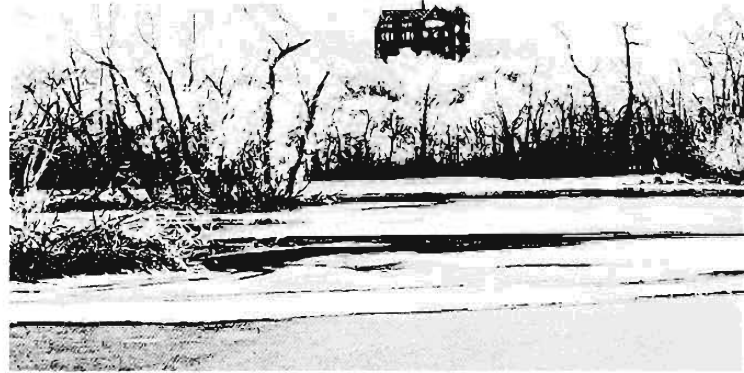
occasional visits to the local Norwegian Methodist church. He neatly balanced town and rural interests as a member and officer of the Montevideo Commercial Club and the Chippewa County Agricultural and Mechanical Association. But he was perhaps most active in civic and political pursuits. When Montevideo was a village he served as a trustee and treasurer; when in 1908 it became a city he ran successfully for alderman and was elected president of the city council. His probate judge and county surveyor positions were elective offices to which he repeatedly won re-election, sometimes as a Republican and sometimes as a Democrat, depending on which way he felt the political breezes blowing.²¹

Appropriately for a botanist and horticulturalist, he worked to get Montevideo its first park and served many years on the park board. He used the experience to write a charming and informative article called "Park Planting for Prairie Towns." It began: "The prairie village usually grows up around a railway station, the station itself, a water tank and a row of grain elevators forming the civic center, so to speak. Everything else must be created." He went on to discuss beautification of the area round the station, city water tank, and public square. If the town has a lake shore or a riverbank, no time should be lost in developing it as a park. In closing he warned: "A park is for rest and quiet. Do not spoil it with carpet bedding, bandstand, or other obtrusive work of man."²²

In 1879 he helped found the Montevideo Library Club; he then worked to create a public library that incorporated the collections of the earlier club and served on the new board after it was organized in 1892. Moyer also devoted his wide-ranging attention to the town's schools, serving on both the village school board and, beginning in 1885, that of Western Minnesota Seminary (later Windom Institute and, later still, Windom College). And he was a charter member of Montevideo's volunteer fire department.²³

While his activities won him the high regard of his fellow townspeople, some of them also noticed in him and his brother Lloyd a certain aloofness and loftiness of manner that, behind their backs, gave L. R. the nickname of "Lord Righteous," while his brother, L. G., was known as "Lord God." Lycurgus' lack of advanced formal schooling notwithstanding, the Moyers were regarded as "the best educated family that ever had come to Montevideo" in the early days — a distinction that is often hard to live down.

Montevideo changed during Moyer's life from a rough frontier settlement to a small but thriving city of some sophistication. He could look back to the beginning of every local organization to which he belonged, and when he spoke at a meeting of any one of them, he was likely to emphasize its history. Sometimes he indulged his boyhood habit of versifying, often humorously, as in his address to the 30th annual meeting of the



A POST CARD view of the Chippewa River in winter, with the Windom Institute on the bluff beyond

Congregational church. Commemorating each of the ministers, he wrote of one:

Then Dennis Goodsell came as pastor
And Abbie whom his sermons wrote;
In running once to catch a pussy
He lost his Sunday preaching coat.

For pussy proved to be a pole-cat;
The coat was buried in the ground;
And that more fruitful fields of labor
We always hoped that Dennis found.²⁴

His historical bent and poetical flair benefited other organizations, including the Masons, the Montevideo Methodist church, and, farther afield, the Minnesota State Horticultural Society. Apparently he did not favor

²¹ Moyer was raised a Unitarian and was described by his family as a "Republican with independent tendencies"; Lee Collection. See also Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:281; *Montevideo Leader*, January 23, 1885, p. 1, March 30, 1917, p. 1; Moyer, Diary, January 30, July 27-29, 1884; Montevideo Council Minutes, December 16, 1879, August 6, 1908, January 6, 1911, March 19, 1917; *Chippewa County Commercial*, October 8, p. 4, and 15, p. 1, November 12, p. 4, 1886.

²² *Montevideo Leader*, April 8, 1892, p. 1; Montevideo Council Minutes, August 6, 1908; *Minnesota Horticulturist*, 41:401-405 (November, 1913).

²³ Here and below, see "History of the Library in Montevideo," typescript, ca. 1968, in Montevideo Public Library; *Montevideo Commercial*, February 5, 1892, p. 1, March 16, 1917, p. 5; *Montevideo Leader*, February 5, 1892, p. 1, April 12, 1907, p. 4, April 13, 1917, p. 1; Austin interview, August 4, 7, 1981, interview with Mrs. Clarence Ostlie, August 4, 1981, notes in author's possession; *Historical Album*, 39, 115; Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:268-271. Windom College closed in 1923.

²⁴ Here and below, see Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:283; *Montevideo Advance*, January 4, 1899, p. 5; index to bequest of Katherine Moyer Butterfield to CCHS; *Minnesota Horticulturist*, 39:150-153 (April, 1911); *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5.

the Minnesota Historical Society, of which he was a life member, with a poetical rendering of its history, perhaps because it had begun before his own arrival on the Minnesota scene.



THE VOLUNTEER fire company of Montevideo, photographed in front of its station in 1885

BUT THE MAN who studied the history of the Reformation when ill at the age of 20, the man who addressed Montevideo's Chautauqua circle on ancient history and on biology, did more than amuse an occasional meeting. He edited the history of Chippewa County, which, with that of Lac qui Parle County, edited by O. G. Dale, was published a year before Moyer's death. In it he wrote in a reflective vein what he called "An Egotistical Chapter" — reminiscences that are the basis of much that is known of early Montevideo and the portions of the surrounding country familiar to the young surveyor. This chapter, along with the valuable botanical writing in the same volume, reveals a man of extraordinary mental vigor, a man of humor (in spite of his formidable reputation), who reserved from his civic duties enough time and energy to pursue the private interests that were most important to him.²⁵

²⁵ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:68–86, 87–92, 371–394.

²⁶ *Verses by Lycurgus R. Moyer*, n.p., privately printed, (Montevideo, n.d.), copy in CCHS. The Butterfield bequest index reveals that he wrote some 11 essays on authors and literary subjects, but unfortunately they cannot now be found.

²⁷ Here and below, see *Minnesota Horticulturist*, vols. 17–45 (1889–1917), particularly 19:141 (1891), 20:201–205 (1892), 21:365–368 (1893), 22:394 (1894), 26:272 (July, 1898), 27:181–183 (May, 1899), 31:253 (July, 1903), 45:195 (May, 1917).

²⁸ Here and below, see *Minnesota Horticulturist*, 20:201, 28:223–226 (June, 1901); Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:68–71, 88.

One serious poem presents both his religious viewpoint and his need to escape from the turmoil of the market place. He called it "The Invitation."

Let us leave the dull town, with its pride and unholy ambition,
With its struggle for gold — and its evil surmises and gossip.
Let us off to the fields, to the hills and the woods and the prairies.
Shall we forth to the hills and worship the spirit who made them —
Worship the God of the fields — the God of the woods and the forests?²⁶

Another facet of Moyer's botanical pursuits began in 1889 when Samuel B. Green, professor of horticulture and dean of the forestry school at the University of Minnesota, sent Moyer some young Russian willows and poplar trees to plant near his house. From this simple beginning developed the Montevideo Horticultural Trial Station, which Moyer superintended for the rest of his life.²⁷

Moyer joined the Minnesota State Horticultural Society during the year Green sent him the trees and was an active member for the remainder of his life, serving on its executive board from 1896 to 1913. During this time he contributed 64 reports and articles to the society's journal. Most of these were his reports as superintendent of the trial station and were later called "the most important trial station reports, including both fruits and flowers, that were published by this society." A few titles indicate the breadth of his horticultural knowledge: "Trees, Shrubs and Flowering Plants of the Upper Minnesota Valley"; "Floriculture"; "Report of Committee on Forestry"; "Shade Trees for Ornament about the Home"; "Judicial Mindedness in Horticultural Experimentation." His scientific writing was lively and frequently poetic. An article entitled "Some Desirable Things for Prairie Planting" began with "Jock, when ye hae naething else to do, you may aye be sticking in a tree; it will be growing. Jock, when ye are sleeping" — Scott."

It was as a botanist, not a horticulturist, that he made his major contribution and reputation. His writings also contained careful, well-informed discussions of the associated geology, especially that of the glacial age and its influence on the landscape and flora.²⁸

His 1910 discussion of prairie flora noted that most of the variety of trees, shrubs, and flowers of the region seemed to be extending their range to the west. "The buffalo berry is the only one of them that seems to have come from the west." Then spoke Moyer the ecologist, "beset with many difficulties," as he tried to write about the flora of the vanishing prairies. "The breaking plow has been at work in this region for about fifty years, extending the wheat fields, and the remaining portions

of the prairie have been fenced in by barb wire fences and closely pastured."

That he kept abreast of changes in scientific botany was evident when he wrote: "Some of the names used in this paper have an unfamiliar sound. This is due to the action of the Vienna Congress in restoring to use certain generic names that have not been used by American botanists for many years. For the sake of uniformity it is likely that their use will have to be acquiesced in."²⁹

In a paper for the Minnesota Academy of Science Moyer discussed the significance of some 35 different legumes in the development of the fertility of the prairie soils. "As nearly as the writer can remember, the most common of the prairie legumes was *Psoralea argophylla*, Pursh [*silver-leaved psoralea*], and it was the silvery silky-white pubescence of this plant that contributed so much toward giving the prairies their prevailing gray tint. It is a plant of wide distribution all over the north-western plains."³⁰

He made clear his interest in ethnobotany as well: "The common ground-plum of the Minnesota prairies [*Astragalus caryocarpus*], was very common in the early days, and tradition tells us that its fleshy pods were frequently cooked by travelers as a substitute for green peas. One writer has testified that its flavor is midway between that of green peas and asparagus. For many years back the plant has been so infested with 'pea bugs' that no one would care to eat the dish." He recalled that "The boys who broke the prairies of western Minnesota forty years ago have vivid recollections of the devil's shoe strings, the plant with so tough a root that it would double around the sharpest plowshare and clog the breaking plow. This plant is *Amorpha canescens* Pursh [*lead plant*], and it was very common." Its whitened foliage also contributed to the gray appearance of the prairies.

Moyer's article on "Extension of Plant Ranges in the Upper Minnesota Valley" listed 13 species of "plants that have been collected [there] since the publication of Professor MacMillan's *Metaspermae of the Minnesota Valley*." Moyer's work indicated that he believed many of them had been brought in by the railroads. He described several as troublesome weeds.³¹

Certainly Moyer was familiar with many of the botanical texts of the period. He took occasion to comment on them, not always favorably. MacMillan's *Metaspermae*, he believed, "was based on insufficient field work, and so abounds in conclusions not warranted by facts." Warren Upham's "Catalogue of the Flora of Minnesota" (1883) he considered "a scholarly work admittedly incomplete."³²

Active membership in local and national organizations, notably the Minnesota Botanical Society, the Minnesota Academy of Science, the Gray Memorial Chapter of the Agassiz Association, the Field Museum of Natural

History, the Torrey Botanical Club, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, fed Moyer's interest and enhanced his expertise in the flora of the region.³³

His work was considered significant by contemporary professional botanists concerned with the range of plant species. Edmund P. Sheldon frequently referred to Moyer's herbarium, which contained some species "not previously reported from Minnesota." MacMillan's *Metaspermae* cited Moyer's collections as contributing to the knowledge of the limits of species in his region; under the entries for a great many species in that volume appears "*Herb [arium] Moyer, Montevideo*."³⁴

John M. Holzinger, professor at Winona State Normal School and formerly a home missionary in Cottonwood County, wrote in his "The Moss Flora of the Upper Minnesota River" that at Montevideo "the securing and care of materials was greatly facilitated by the many courtesies of Judge Lycurgus R. Moyer, resident at Montevideo, and it seems proper in this connection to make acknowledgement of his assistance. From here on [*up to Big Stone Lake and back to Montevideo*], Mr. Moyer accompanied the writer, assisting generously in all possible ways to make the expedition a success. The fact that he had traversed the region some years before in the capacity of a surveyor rendered him the more valuable both as guide and advisor."³⁵

Holzinger sent Moyer a reprint of another article and wrote at the end of the text: "Since you so promptly sent me so excellent a lot of your *Talinum*, and since it is almost certain to prove a species distinct from *T. parviflorum*, I propose to name it *T. moyeri*, unless you object." Apparently Holzinger decided the specimen was not of a new species; the name was never published.

²⁹ Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:86. On the Vienna Congress, see note 16, above.

³⁰ Here and below, see L. R. Moyer, "The Prairie Legumes of Western Minnesota," in Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:89, 90, 92.

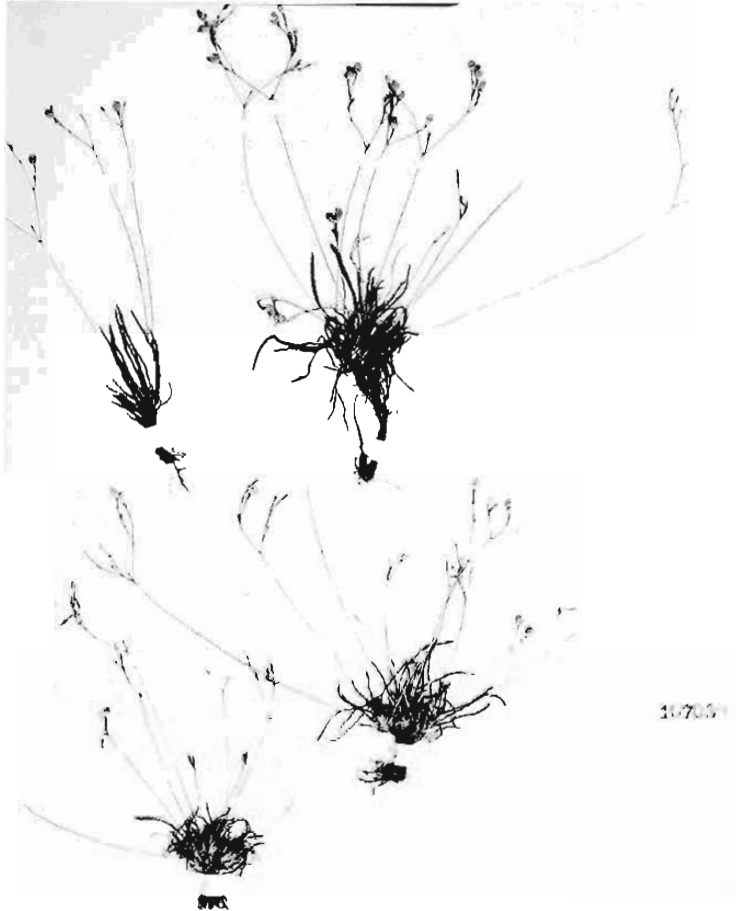
³¹ Conway MacMillan, ed., *Minnesota Botanical Studies*, 2:191 (Minneapolis, 1898-1902); MacMillan, *The Metaspermae of the Minnesota Valley* (Minneapolis, 1892).

³² Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:87.

³³ Minnesota Botanical Society, *Circular No. 4* [1901]; *Montevideo Commercial*, March 16, 1917, p. 5; Lee Collection; Butterfield bequest index.

³⁴ Edmund P. Sheldon, "Further Extensions of Plant Ranges," and "Additional Extensions of Plant Ranges," 1:70, 585, in *Minnesota Botanical Studies* (1894-98); MacMillan, *Metaspermae*, 9, 269, 337.

³⁵ Here and two paragraphs below, see Holzinger, in *Minnesota Botanical Studies*, 3:109 (1903-04); Moyer and Dale, *Chippewa County*, 1:89; Holzinger, "The Geographical Distribution of the Teretifolium Group of *Talinum*," in *Asa Gray Bulletin*, April, 1900, p. 1-4. John B. Moyle and Evelyn W. Moyle, *Northland Wild Flowers*, 28 (Minneapolis, 1977); Owenbey interview, August, 1981, notes in author's possession.



A FAME flower from Moyer's herbarium now at the University of Minnesota

Not only did his contemporaries value his scientific accomplishments, but as recently as the 1970s botanists John and Evelyn Moyle, in discussing the prairie turnip, called Moyer "an excellent botanist." And in 1981, Dr. Gerald B. Owenbey, curator of the herbarium in the botany department at the University of Minnesota, ranked L. R. Moyer as "a fine collector."

DURING his lifetime Moyer contributed mounted specimens to the herbaria at Harvard University, the New York Botanical Gardens, Michigan State University,

³⁶ *Regnum Vegetabile*, vol. 93, *Index Herbariorum*, part 2, *Collectors*, section 4, p. 565 (Utrecht, 1976); *Minnesota Botanical Studies*, 1:192. Specimens in the Asa Gray Herbarium at Harvard are explained in a letter from George Safford Torrey, assistant at the Gray Herbarium, to Moyer, discussing the identity of 13 specimens of roses sent to the herbarium and thanking Moyer for his contribution; Torrey to Moyer, October 29, 1913, in Herbarium archives, University of Minnesota.

³⁷ Here and two paragraphs below, see Amos F. Moyer to Burton, October 21, 1917, in University of Minnesota Botany Department Papers, University Archives; Rosendahl to Burton, October 29, 1917, January 9, 1918; to Mrs. L. R. Moyer, March 18, 1918, copies in Herbarium archives. Moyer's specimens are now distributed throughout the herbarium; unfortunately the catalog of his collection cannot be located. The volumes of Moyer's scientific library have apparently been absorbed into the university library.

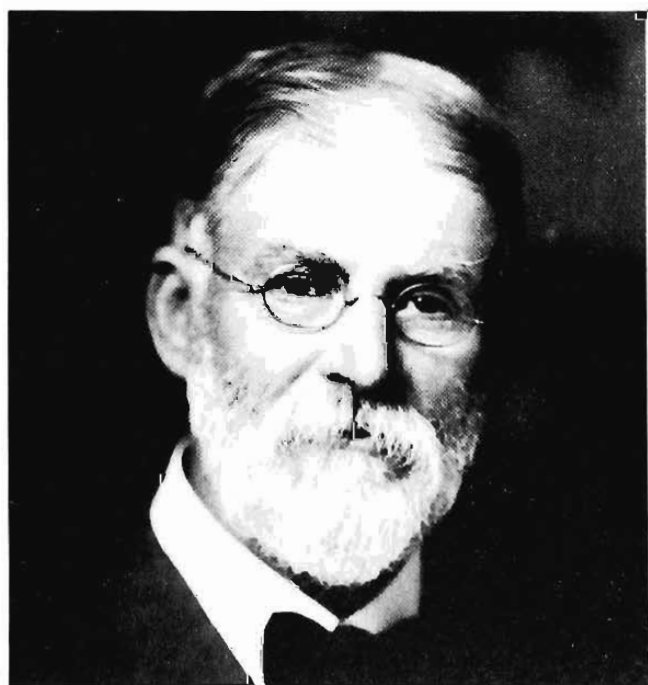
ty, and the University of Minnesota. The specimens at the New York Botanical Gardens may have resulted from the visit to Montevideo of E. L. Morris, later curator of the Brooklyn Museum. Moyer and Morris "collected a rose on the granite ledge two miles north of Montevideo which [Morris] was unable to name." Moyer gave specimens of the plants discussed in his "Extension of Plant Ranges" and two other small collections to the University of Minnesota.³⁶

Upon his death, L. R.'s family offered his herbarium and scientific library to the University of Minnesota. A letter from his son Amos to university president Marion L. Burton indicated that the collection consisted of "about five thousand specimens of wild plants which are dried, identified and mounted on bristol cardboard, carefully labeled, classified and catalogued," and a library containing "in the neighborhood of two hundred volumes devoted to scientific Botany." A member of the herbarium staff supervised the packing of the collection, which subsequently arrived safe and sound in St. Paul.³⁷

Carl O. Rosendahl, professor of botany and acting curator of the herbarium, wrote: "I think the University is fortunate indeed to receive this very valuable botanical collection as a gift, especially since it could have been disposed of easily to other institutions for a considerable sum of money.

"It is particularly valuable for the reason that the collection represents an area of the state from which the University Herbarium has comparatively little material. It is a rare gift and the Moyer family has shown a

LYCURGUS MOYER in a Lee Brothers photograph about 1917



most commendable spirit in wishing to leave this collection . . . where it will be accessible to the greatest number of people interested in the study of plants."

When Lycurgus Rose Moyer died unexpectedly on March 13, 1917, after a brief attack of pneumonia, the local press mourned the loss of "Montevideo's Most Prominent Citizen. . . a pioneer of this city, a kindly, generous and public spirited man whose influence for good and whose achievements in helping to build up our city, our schools and institutions are without parallel. On every hand is heard expressions of sorrow and regret and we doubt if there is another man who would be so sadly missed." On a wintry March 16, after a service at the Methodist church, the largest in town, the coffin was escorted to the cemetery by a long line of black-coated figures: the city council, the Masonic lodge, the fire company, and all the prominent citizens of the community. Though his friends and family mourned him, L. R. Moyer's work as Montevideo civic leader, author of the Chippewa County history, and prairie botanist lived on.³⁸

As increasing concern for the environment has intensified interest in the prairies, the efforts of various groups and agencies have located and arranged to preserve many undisturbed remnants of the grasslands. Other areas that have retained native flora despite grazing, haying, and other agricultural uses are now managed so as to restore the prairie ecosystems. North of Lac qui Parle, for instance, hundreds of prairie acres are now under protection in the Nature Conservancy's Chippewa Prairie and the state's Lac qui Parle Wildlife Area. Near Appleton, 360 acres are protected in the Sleeping Bison Prairie, recently transferred from the Nature Conservancy to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.³⁹

For Lycurgus Moyer, whose busy life included con-

cern for these prairie tracts, there had been time for reflection. Despite his seemingly overwhelming number of civic, political, and fraternal obligations and his various and concurrent occupations, he was able to look ahead with a contemplative eye. His horticultural essay, "Plums of the Village Lot," concludes: "When the bright golden days of the future come, of which the poets have dreamed, there will be a plum patch in every village lot, and the village boy will not have to visit the neighbor's orchard to get the fruit that belongs to him as a matter of right. Plant plums and give the small boy a chance at home."⁴⁰

How proud the former small boy from New York State would have been to see his long-time interest in botany live on as a major contribution to the herbarium of the University of Minnesota! How surprised and pleased he would feel that there are many areas now preserved that exemplify his beloved prairies.

³⁸Montevideo Commercial, March 16, p. 3, and 23, p. 1, 1917.

³⁹The Nature Conservancy, with a chapter in Minnesota, is a conservation organization "whose resources are devoted to the protection of natural areas and the diversity of life they support." See R. Newell Searle and Mark E. Heitlinger, *Prairies, Woods and Islands: A Guide to the Minnesota Preserves of the Nature Conservancy*, inside back cover (Minneapolis, 1980); see also the special prairies issue of *Nature Conservancy News*, Spring, 1977.

⁴⁰"Plums of the Village Lot," in *Minnesota Horticulturist*, 26:272.

THE SPECIMENS photographed on p. 72 and p. 81 by Alan Ominsky are in the University of Minnesota Herbarium; the pictures on p. 74, 77, and 79 are from the Chippewa County Historical Society; the one on p. 76 is from the Nature Conservancy, and the one on p. 82 is in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. All others are in the MHS audio-visual library.

A MODERN VIEW of a Minnesota prairie preserve





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