

THE ROLLING STONE COLONY

Labor Rhetoric in Action

Christopher M. Johnson

ON Monday, July 21, 1851, an announcement appeared in the *New York Tribune* advertising a lecture to be given on the following Wednesday evening. The meeting would take place at the Grand Street Hall and would discuss plans for "a new Western Settlement." The notice gave no other particulars, but was repeated in the Wednesday issue of the *Tribune*. The organization that this meeting launched, the Western Farm and Village Association, showed clearly the aspirations of eastern workingmen. The group was to found a settlement in southeastern Minnesota to realize their dreams of financial and social independence. Although this effort failed, the story of the association tells us much about the beliefs of its members, their conviction that life on the Minnesota frontier could restore to them lost American virtues.

The years from 1825 to the Civil War were a time of extensive labor agitation. The skilled workingmen, or "mechanics," of urban America were not reconciled to their changing status in the emerging industrial society; many of them were only a generation removed from the farm. The flood of immigrants that would later complicate the urban labor situation had not yet begun, and many workingmen still believed that their condition was or should be merely temporary. In their view the true worth of a man depended upon his ownership of land, and all should have the opportunity to attain agrarian independence. During this period the labor movement was reactionary in many respects; it looked back to a supposed golden era of American democracy when yeomen farmers tilled their own freehold of land.¹

Thus the early history of the labor movement in the United States was intimately associated with the issue of land reform. Many workers, or at least their avowed spokesmen, saw the wage system as degrading; they sought a method of escaping from it and thereby improving both their economic and social position. In the eyes of many workers, the obvious means of accomplishing this goal lay with the vast public lands in the West. They believed that the government should give

¹ On the movement here and below, see, for example, Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, chapter 10 (New York, 1947); Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America*, chapter 7 (Revised ed, New York, 1961).

The author is grateful for assistance from the late Professor Henry Hull of Winona State University and the Reverend Joseph Minnes for securing photocopies of the *Advocate*, without which this research would have been impossible, as well as Professor Roger Lane of Haverford College for his patient assistance in the writing of this article.

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each man the opportunity for emigration to his own freehold in those lands. In their view, such a movement would both realize the personal dreams of the individual and strengthen the fiber of American rural democracy. The Western Farm and Village Association acted upon these beliefs, seeking a new life in the Minnesota Territory.

On the appointed evening a large crowd filled the Grand Street Hall to hear William Haddock, a 29-year-



old printer, present his plan for western settlement. Haddock proposed a society made up of 150 to 200 family men of mixed occupations; they would emigrate to government lands in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, or Michigan. There they would lay out a village in which each member of the proposed society would receive a four-acre village plot, as well as 160 acres of farmland from the tract surrounding the settlement. Haddock maintained that this was the most "comfortable and profitable" form of settlement, one that "secured the advantages of civilization." Most of his listeners responded favorably, and many signed a pact setting forth their purpose and expressing their hope of leaving for the

² New York City, Census, 1850, ward 8, sheet 5 for August 7, 1850; *New York Daily Tribune*, July 24, 1851, hereafter cited as *Tribune*.

³ Horace Greeley, publisher of the *Tribune*, enthusiastically advocated the land policies that would make these lofty aims possible. His paper publicized many lectures and meetings such as that of July 21, and Greeley was an important convert to a movement begun principally by George Henry Evans; Helene Sara Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862*, 45 (New York, 1941). For more on Evans, who believed a man's ownership of land was a part of natural law, the protection each individual had against oppression, and an expression of his liberty, see John R. Commons, *et al.*, *History of Labour in the United States*, especially chapters 2-5 (New York, 1918); Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860*, 180-182 (Boston, 1924). The Western Farm and Village Association was to be closely connected, both in its espoused principles and in actual membership, with the National Reform Association founded by Evans in 1844. On Young, see Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen*, 100. Young was one of two representatives of the National Reform Association to attend the August, 1852, convention of the Free Democracy party; its platform contained land reform planks partly as a result of his influence.

⁴ *Tribune*, August 27, 1851, and following Wednesday issues.

West early the following spring. The group called itself the "Farm and Village Association" and resolved to meet again in the near future to organize more fully.²

Apparently not all of those in the audience so eagerly endorsed Haddock's program, however; a lengthy letter from William J. Young, appearing in the *Tribune* for Friday, July 25, discussed what he saw as the dangers of the scheme. Young had been a member of the National Reform Association and was still influential in the land-reform movement. He attacked the project as an expression of "commercialism," in that it set up each man as a speculator by giving him four acres of village land to sell at a profit to later arriving settlers. Young wrote that he had protested at the meeting, pointing out this objection, but that he felt the need to place the issue before the public. In a strongly worded attack, Young asserted that Haddock's program would "retard the benign project of the freedom of the public lands," and even that "they who project this scheme are enemies in disguise."³

This contention provoked a response from Haddock, whose letter in the *Tribune* for July 28 was calm and coherent. He saw no impropriety in poor men working to increase the value of their holdings: "The disposition to improve one's conditions is natural." And, since each member of the association would be restricted to 160 acres of farmland, the program was consistent with the principle of Land Limitation." In his most revealing response, Haddock described what he thought should be the guiding outlook of the organization: "The great object aimed at in the 'Farm and Village' movement is something that can be practically carried out without being hampered by killing abstractions." In this way Haddock seemed to be attempting to separate his group from what he saw as more radical, and hence impractical, agrarian reforming schemes of the period.

The *Tribune* of Tuesday, August 5, announced that the next official meeting for the new association would be at the Grand Street Hall the following evening. William Haddock, who had signed the notice, invited the general public to attend. By this time the group had titled itself the Western Farm and Village Association, a name that it would retain. Beginning on August 27, the association held regular weekly meetings at the Grand Street location; these gatherings were always announced in the *Tribune*, "responsible persons of good disposition" being solicited to join the organization.⁴

After November the group changed its meeting place to the Mechanic's Institute of New York, a revealing move: from the first most of the members were urban mechanics. At some point during this period the association drew up a constitution, printed and distributed by Haddock. In light of the debate between Haddock and Young, its opening passage is illuminating: "An independent homestead, surrounded by the com-

T H E

WESTERN FARM AND VILLAGE

ADVOCATE.

Devoted to the Interests of the Western Farm and Village Association of the City of New-York.

NUMBER]

NEW-YORK, APRIL 10, 1852.

[FIVE.

forts of civilization, has ever been an object of the deepest solicitude among men, and their happiness or misery has depended, to a considerable extent, upon its possession or non-possession."⁵

The aspirations of the association would be little known were it not for the public interest shown in its plan, as well as for Haddock's occupation. Since he was a printer, he determined to publish a small newspaper devoted to the association's interests. This publication, which Haddock titled the *Western Farm and Village Advocate*, issued its first number on January 1, 1852. In stating the purpose of the journal, Haddock pointed to the severe demands made upon his time by the flood of inquiries sent to him as president, all requesting information about the organization. Since the association was increasing rapidly in size, the *Advocate* also served to keep members informed of important activities.

THE FIRST ISSUE of the *Advocate* spelled out the motives and goals of the group; it also recapitulated in a general way the actions taken by the association during the course of the previous fall. Of particular note were the definite steps the association's leadership took to separate themselves from what they saw as more radical utopian schemes and doctrines. "The most prominent idea held out in the 'Western Farm and Village' Movement, as in most other organizations for improving the physical condition of man, is the *acquisition of wealth*. This is the governing consideration with a large majority of those who engage in such enterprises. Divest our organization of this feature, and it would probably fail of being successful. There are, indeed, other considerations and advantages to be derived from it, but these of themselves would be insufficient to induce men to break the ties of association, affection and interest, and seek out new objects in a strange land. It requires a stronger stimulus than merely intellectual or moral considerations to effect an abandonment of old and perhaps remunerating pursuits for the prosecution of enterprises that are new and possibly hazardous; and that stimulus is found in the *probability or certainty* which exists in

any given enterprise for the accumulation of riches, and thereby the means of independence."⁶

The article continued, enumerating all of the fiscal advantages of the program, claiming that each settler would realize a gain of over \$4,000. In this sense William Young's assessment of the group's goals was entirely correct, since the plan would allow, even encourage, each member of the association to engage in the traditional American activity of land speculation, if only on a small scale. In fact, as Haddock said, the principal appeal of the organization was the lure of wealth. "*Can any person, of limited means, do better than to embark in this enterprise?*" he asked.⁷

Haddock's words make a significant statement about the group's motivations. It would seem that their major objection to urban existence was that it made them pawns in the emerging wage system. They did not have "the means of independence" because they could never accumulate sufficient capital to strike out on their own. They saw themselves as inevitably trapped in the city, powerless to improve their situation.

One should be skeptical, however, of completely accepting Haddock's seemingly pragmatic arguments. Even if it were true that significant financial gains could be made by the scheme, a strong probability remains that for the association members emigration to the West was far from a hardheaded business decision. A man with the ambition that William Haddock apparently had could have undoubtedly found a much more conservative and certain avenue for financial advancement. He was probably a printer of some substance, since before leaving New York he advertised used printing equipment for sale.⁸ It seems as if he continually emphasized the fiscal arguments for the plan as a means of convinc-

⁵ "The Western Farm and Village Association, of the City of New-York, to the People of the United States," 1, copy in the Winona (Minnesota) County Historical Society.

⁶ *Western Farm and Village Advocate* (New York), January 1, 1852, copies in the Winona County Historical Society.

⁷ *Advocate*, January 1, 1852.

⁸ *New York Daily Times*, September 30, 1851.

ing others, and perhaps even himself, that they were making a reasonable and calculated move.

The first number of the *Advocate* also printed a plan depicting the sort of community the group wished to found. The map showed a village laid out in a rectangle, quartered by a broad main street and a river. In the center of the diagram lay a public square, and each quarter of the village had its own park. Streets neatly divided 144 individual lots, each three acres in size, although a member would be free to subdivide his holding into smaller housing plots for future sale. Such a community would occupy a huge area for 144 families—nearly two square miles.

The association quickly moved ahead in its program, dispatching an agent to the West in early November with instructions to examine possible sites for the settlement. This man was Ransom Smith, who was closely associated with George Henry Evans and his National Reform Association. Smith had twice run for mayor of New York, in 1845 and 1846; he had based his platform upon the agrarian ideals of National Reform. He reported on the progress of his journey with a series of letters to the association, the first arriving in early December. This correspondence is interesting in light of the debate of the previous summer between Haddock and Young over the issue of land speculation. Smith wrote in a polemical style that decried the way in which men haphazardly snatched up much more land than they could possibly till in the hope that its value would rise. The land speculator was the great villain of agrarian idealists, even though the men who actually settled the frontier had from colonial times traditionally been small- or large-scale speculators. Smith maintained: "Our government is making ridiculous work of selling our public lands, and the sooner some radical change is brought about by which the *actual settler* can get hold of the soil *without embarrassment* the better."⁹

THE GROUP chose a locating committee empowered to make the final site selection. The membership of this committee demonstrates the close relations between the National Reform and the Western Farm and Village associations. One man chosen was Alvan E. Bovay, who was well known in labor circles during the 1840s. He later became a major organizing influence behind the young Republican party. After 1850 he lived mostly in Ripon, Wisconsin, and was partly responsible for the 1854 meeting there that launched the Republican party.¹⁰ His involvement with the Farm and Village Association, however, suggests that he still spent time

⁹ Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen*, 82; *Advocate*, January 1, 1852.

¹⁰ Francis Curtis, *The Republican Party*, 1:174-178 (New York, 1904).



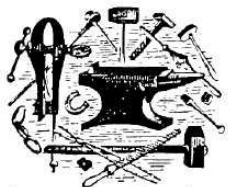
A "PROPOSED PLAN" for the Rolling Stone settlement appeared in the first issue of the *Advocate*.

in New York. Thus it is apparent that the association quickly attracted the attention of influential land reformers, and that the group secured an agent through this patronage.

Ransom Smith's activities convinced the members that the best place for settlement would be Minnesota Territory. They exchanged a series of letters with Henry H. Sibley, Minnesota territorial representative to Congress at the time, in which he extolled the limitless virtues of his region. Sibley's letters suggested that the most promising area for settlement was the Minnesota River Valley. During the summer of 1851 a treaty with the Dakota (Sioux) had opened this region for settlement, and Sibley advertised its broad, rich valley as perfect farmland. Throughout the early issues of the *Advocate* various articles glowingly described the Minnesota River Valley. Although none of Sibley's original letters to or from the association have survived in his papers, the *Advocate* of March 10, 1852, referred to a small pamphlet descriptive of Minnesota that Sibley

sent to the group. Printed in February of 1852, it reads like a description of Eden: "Many beautiful lakes of limpid water are found within [Minnesota's] limits, which are the resort of myriads of wild fowl, including swans, geese and ducks. The dense thickets along its border afford places of concealment for the deer, which are killed in great numbers by the Indians. In this beautiful country are to be found all the requisites to sustain a dense population. The soil is of great fertility and unknown depth, covered as it is with the mould of a thousand years."¹¹ Since the association apparently received no such attention from any other source, it seems likely that Sibley's influence figured strongly in the choice made to settle in Minnesota.

The association met regularly throughout the first weeks of 1852 and had appointed a committee—Haddock, A. Murphy, a New York City blacksmith, and



Alvan Bovay—to select a site for the settlement. Haddock and Murphy left New York for Minnesota on Thursday, February 5 (Bovay did not make the trip), and reached Chicago by February 12. As they traveled through Wisconsin, they sent back glowing reports of the countryside. These idyllic descriptions were accompanied, however, by stern warnings regarding the difficulties involved. On February 25 they reached La Crosse, a village on the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi. From this point the two intended to move up to the mouth of the Minnesota River, always watching for potential village sites along the way.¹²

Haddock and Murphy had differing responses to their first view of Minnesota across the river. The valley

is about five miles wide at that point, and one can see clearly the bluffs and small side valleys on the other side. In contrast to modern-day tourists, Murphy stated: "Here we got the first glimpse of our land of promise, Minnesota, and I must say as we looked at its ragged bluffs it presented anything but an encouraging prospect." Haddock was struck by another impression; Murphy tells us that his companion was so eager to reach Minnesota that he capsized a small canoe that they had obtained to ferry them across a break in the ice and was forced to swim to the other side of the open water. Such behavior does not suggest the image of the levelheaded businessman that Haddock maintained in New York. Surviving this potentially disastrous event, they continued on up the river using skates, reaching Wabasha Prairie (now Winona) after two days' travel, a distance of 25 miles. Only a few shanties had been built there, but already the residents had begun to squabble over conflicting claims. To Haddock and Murphy this situation afforded a sterling example of the evils of unorganized settlement.¹³

After spending a day or two at Wabasha the two continued their journey upriver. Immediately above Wabasha the main channel of the Mississippi begins to swing far over to the Wisconsin side of the valley. Here Murphy and Haddock made what would prove to be a costly error. They apparently mistook for the navigation channel what is now called Straight Slough, a backwater that enters the main flow at the head of Wabasha

¹¹ Sibley, *Minnesota Territory: Its Present Condition and Prospects*, 3 (Washington, D.C., 1852), copy in Henry H. Sibley Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul.

¹² *Advocate*, February 25, 1852. Murphy's name was probably Andrew; *Doggett's New York City Directory*, 1850-51, p. 367.

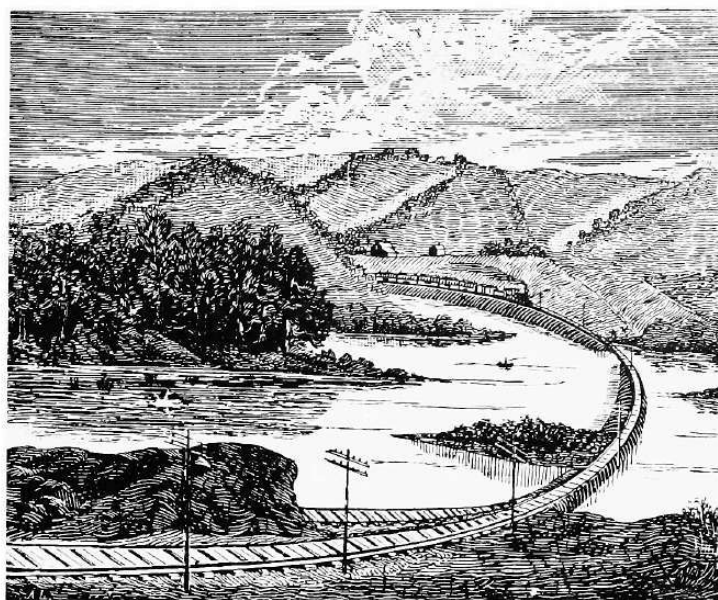
¹³ *Advocate*, April 10, 1852.

THIS DETAIL from the *Andreas Atlas of 1874* shows Straight Slough, mistaken for the river's main channel.



Prairie. They skated up Straight Slough for some miles until they reached a beautiful little valley that branched off to the west. It appeared to have all of the attributes the association was searching for, and Haddock became entranced with the location. From local Indian tradition he adopted the name of Rolling Stone. The site actually consists of a network of smaller valleys, called coulees, that converge to join the Mississippi Valley about six miles above Wabasha. Rolling Stone undoubtedly was, as it is still today, a beautiful location, ideal in many respects for settlement. But Haddock and Murphy did not realize that because of numerous sandbars Straight Slough was not navigable. Rolling Stone was separated from the nearest possible steamboat landing by several miles of backwaters, potholes, and swamps.¹⁴

The association had made plans for retaining the site, once it had been chosen, and for keeping squatters and speculators from obtaining a hold on it. Haddock remained on the location while Murphy hastened back to New York to dispatch the "pioneer squad," a group of 11 young men prepared to leave on short notice to join Haddock and help him secure the land until the rest of the membership could arrive. The pioneer squad left New York in early April, 1852, and reached Wabasha on April 14. By that time Haddock had negotiated a solution to the major problem with the site, in the form of a



THE Rolling Stone Valley, from an 1865 sketch

squatter already established at the mouth of the Rolling Stone Valley. Israel Noracong claimed 160 acres surrounding his shanty and refused to leave. Haddock convinced him to join the Farm and Village Association and to defer to the group his claim to the valley, excepting 15 acres immediately around his cabin.¹⁵

¹⁴ There are several descriptions of how Haddock and Murphy came to mistake Straight Slough for a navigation channel. Unfortunately, these sources do not give Haddock's own explanation of events. See, for example, Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, ed., *The History of Winona County, Minnesota*, 1:150-160 (Chicago, 1913); D. Sinclair, "An Historical, Descriptive, and Statistical Sketch," in *Winona Republican Weekly*, July 12, 1876; Russell Blakeley, "The Advent of Commerce in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8:389-393 (St. Paul, 1898).

¹⁵ *Republican Weekly*, July 12, 1876; [H. H. Hill and Co.], *History of Winona County*, 187, 204 (Chicago, 1883).

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 1 session, 738; *Advocate*, April 10, 1852. Throughout this period Congress was deluged with petitions from all parts of the West and Northwest in favor of homestead legislation. By 1850 this agitation figured to be a major issue in the coming presidential campaign. George M. Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands from 1840 to 1862*, 144 (Boston, 1917).

A close examination of the *Congressional Globe* shows that during late 1851 and the first half of 1852 both houses of Congress daily received homestead petitions, as well as requests for specific grants to finance the construction of highways or railroads. The Western Farm and Village Association submitted its petition to Congress during the height of the controversy. Finally, in May, 1852, the House voted the first such legislation to be passed by either chamber by a two-to-one margin. A bitter debate had lasted from March to May of that year. The fortunes of Haddock's group had become submerged in a larger conflict that defined itself mainly along sectional lines. The South saw such legislation a threat to slave-holding; its power in the Senate defeated the 1852 measure. *Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 1 session, 2194.

IT is interesting that the association, which could be viewed as organized squatting on a huge scale, apparently had no qualms about the propriety of its activities. Members did, however, make a considerable effort to secure from Congress a free grant of land for their settlement. On March 12, 1852, Sibley introduced into the House of Representatives a petition asking for a grant of 160 acres to each member of the association, provided that the settler made some improvement on the land before July, 1852. The land was to come from government holdings between Lake Michigan and the Rocky Mountains. The following Wednesday, March 17, Sibley submitted a similarly worded supporting petition. The Speaker of the House referred the matter to the committee on public lands for study and recommendation. Sibley had assured the association that its petition would be granted, and, if by some chance it were denied, that the homestead bill then pending in Congress would obtain the grant for them in a much more sweeping fashion. The legislation that Sibley was so sure would be enacted was not in fact made law until the next decade; meanwhile, the association traveled west without knowing the fate of its request. Thus although the group attempted to obtain its land by official means, members clearly intended to occupy the site irrespective of government sanction.¹⁶

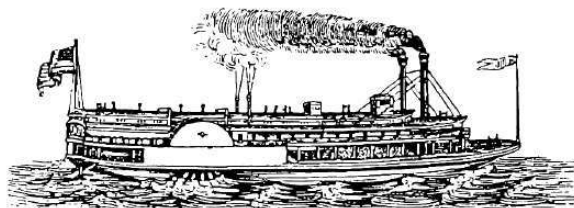
The plan of the Western Farm and Village Association

tion was of a unique sort—a private homestead request. Between its first introduction by Sibley on March 12 and the ultimate tabling of the petition on May 27, Congress received numerous supporting testaments on behalf of the association. One of these was the document Sibley introduced on March 17, but on the same day four other congressmen submitted letters requesting that the association be given its grant of land. On three later dates, March 22, March 27, and April 27, various additional representatives introduced similar memorials. The lobbying effort was thus quite substantial. Even so, it was unsuccessful; on May 25, 1852, the House tabled the request for a grant of land. This action is not surprising, because the House had already passed general homestead legislation. While Congress was considering its petitions, the association had closed its business, and members set out from New York almost exactly according to the schedule set the summer before. The *Tribune* for Tuesday, April 13, announced that a special meeting would take place that evening prior to departure the next day. In the continued absence of William Haddock, the group had elected A. Murphy acting president after the latter's return from Rolling Stone.¹⁷

After the group left New York they discontinued the *Advocate*. But an 1883 history of Winona County briefly recounts their fate after their arrival in the West. The information in this volume is based upon the recollections of former members of the association who had emigrated 30 years before, as well as of other older residents of the county. (The authors also apparently had access to the files of the *Advocate*.) Although suspect as an accurate description of events, the county history is useful for the view it gives of local attitudes. "The people generally considered the association to be a body of fanatical communists," it asserts; "These mistaken ideas and false impressions prejudiced other settlers against them from the first." There was apparently a great deal of antagonism between the new arrivals and the settlers already established in the area, ill feeling augmented both by the attitude held by the members (Haddock's earlier description of the Wabasha settlement is laden with a tone of moral superiority) and the somewhat secretive methods the association employed when dealing with outsiders. In such an atmosphere many local residents predicted the failure of the entire venture, and the colony could expect little help in the face of its enormous difficulties. Unfortunately, the description in the county history consists mostly of uncritical repetition of personal recollections and gives scant information about the day-to-day activities of the settlers. A brief and critical description of the activities of the association appeared in an edition of the Winona paper that celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of the town. This article even refers to Haddock as a "town-site maniac."¹⁸

HADDOCK and the pioneer squad devoted their time before the rest of the group arrived to exploring the area and surveying the land for the new village. Haddock was apparently sufficiently knowledgeable to complete the latter task himself, and he laid out the village much like the original discussed in the first issue of the *Advocate*. He planned a series of lots, each four acres in size, as well as mill lots, parks, streets, and public squares. The association members or their proxies had impartially drawn priority numbers for these lots shortly before leaving New York. From these figures, one can see that the projected "village" was a gigantic proposition. The modern village of Minnesota City occupies only a small part of Haddock's original survey around where Israel Noracong's cabin stood.¹⁹

Parties of the members arrived in late April and early May. Most of them landed at Wabasha Prairie and faced the immediate difficulty of traveling the last six miles to Rolling Stone. There was no road of any kind, and Straight Slough was at extremely high water with resultant flooding of the surrounding lowlands. Haddock induced a steamboat captain to attempt the passage up the slough, but the boat struck a bar shortly



after entering and was forced to turn back. The new settlers waded, walked, and floated in a flatboat up to the valley.

The association held its first official meeting in its new home on May 6, 1852. By unanimous vote the group changed the name of the settlement from Rolling Stone to Minnesota City. One can speculate that this act was significant; perhaps the first, somewhat idyllic, name conjured up images of utopian experiments and the like. Minnesota City is a solid, straightforward, no-nonsense name—one that was perhaps intended to convey a feeling of substance, of a thriving and growing metropolis. Throughout May and June the associates went about as best they could the business of establishing a community. Members sent a petition to Washington applying for a post office at Minnesota City, as well

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 1 session, 1469. Murphy signed the notice as acting president.

¹⁸ [Hill], *Winona County*, 197. The later volume by Curtiss-Wedge, cited in note 14 above, has some new material but consists largely of uncredited transcriptions of the 1883 history. See also Sinclair, in *Republican Weekly*, July 12, 1876.

¹⁹ Here and below, see [Hill], *Winona County*, 299-301; Sinclair, in *Republican Weekly*, July 12, 1876.

as a request to Governor Alexander Ramsey for the appointment of a justice of the peace. The latter request furnishes a glimpse of the possible political orientation of the group's leaders. Haddock's short missive to Ramsey asks for the appointment of the bearer of the letter, Thomas K. Allen, as justice of the peace. The note concludes, "It may not perhaps be improper to remark that he [Allen] is a good Whig and sympathises with your administration." Although Haddock's remark may have been sheer opportunism, one might postulate that his own sympathies lay with the Whigs; both Evans and Bovay had been Whigs, and it is likely that Ransom Smith also was.²⁰

The members tried to improve their property by building cabins, bridges, trails, and roads. Profound difficulties soon arose in the community, however; since there was by their own admission no force other than a desire for capital gain holding the group together, internal dissension soon broke out. Co-operation was lacking, and the members began to squabble like the residents of Wabasha. Additionally, the summer of 1852 in the area was hot and disease ridden, and varieties of sickness afflicted the settlers, a situation perhaps worsened by the location—adjacent to the Mississippi swamps. Even by midsummer it appears that many of the settlers did not yet have proper shelter. One of the many deaths that summer (one source asserts that 20 had died "within a few weeks") was that of William Haddock's wife on August 24. This tragedy seemed to dishearten him totally, and he quickly began to lose interest in the affairs of the colony. By late summer large numbers of settlers were leaving and, since most were former residents of New York or other cities, they returned to urban places.²¹

For his part, Haddock and a large party of his friends left Minnesota City on September 11, going downriver to Iowa. He settled in Anamosa, Iowa, and soon began publication of a newspaper. He had apparently decided that he was not, and could not become, a yeoman farmer; instead he would do that which he knew best. A few of the association members remained, forming the nucleus for the later, smaller village of Minnesota City.

²⁰ Haddock to Ramsey, July 27, 1852, in Alexander Ramsey Papers, MHS. Horace Greeley, a Whig, had a strong influence over the land reformers in their party orientation; Bovay was undoubtedly a Whig; and Evans himself grew increasingly independent, supporting those candidates who endorsed National Reform. Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen*, 100.

²¹ [Hill], *Winona County*, 300, 301; Sinclair, in *Republican Weekly*, July 12, 1876.

²² A William Haddock is given as the first newspaper publisher in Anamosa, but the date is February, 1852; Western Historical Company, *The History of Jones County, Iowa*, 436 (Chicago, 1879).

²³ [Hill], *Winona County*, 247; Bertram to Ramsey, May 27, 1852, Ramsey Papers.



When the government land survey team arrived in the area, these men took claims according to its official terms, ignoring Haddock's original survey. Nine association members claimed the former site of the village.²²

An additional point remains to be raised concerning the venture: how many of the estimated 175 enrolled members of the organization actually journeyed west? The May 6 meeting at Minnesota City listed 52 men as responding to the roll call, and a census taken on May 20 showed 90 men and 400 women and children. Only a few more individuals reached the settlement after that date. Thus although the population of the colony was rather large, many of the association members apparently did not emigrate. A letter from George M. Bertram, signing himself as the corresponding secretary of the Western Farm and Village Association, helps to explain this. He wrote to Governor Ramsey concerning a change of location from Rolling Stone to some point in the Minnesota River Valley. Bertram made it clear that by that date some of the settlers had already left Minnesota dissatisfied with Rolling Stone, and that many of the members remaining in New York also advocated a change. It seems that the Minnesota River region still had strong proponents. Bertram promised an association of 200 families to settle on an alternate location, making it likely that at least as many members of the original group stayed behind as had in fact gone west.²³

Even though the association did not succeed in its effort at Rolling Stone, Bertram's letter shows that many members were not ready to abandon the scheme as impractical. Soon afterward, however, the organization appears to have faded away, perhaps for want of a leader like William Haddock. No further notices can be found in subsequent issues of the *New York Tribune*.

THE HISTORIAN must wonder whether the endeavor really was doomed from the first. In spite of the navigational problems of the river, the valley itself is certainly not an impossible location. Later in the century a large group of immigrants from Luxembourg established themselves in the valley several miles up from its mouth. Their new village, named Rollingstone, was soon flourishing. Certain individual members of the association were successful in their attempt; several were

still living on prosperous farms in the Rollingstone area over 30 years later. Charles Bannon, for example, had been a carman in New York when he joined the association. He was able to acquire the necessary skills for frontier settlement, and even to prosper in comparison with other residents of the county. His farm quickly went beyond the few rows of corn and vegetables that characterized subsistence frontier claims; in 1883 he had considerable livestock, a substantial acreage planted in wheat, and many apple trees.²⁴ His case demonstrates that, given sufficient luck, aptitude, and industry, a New York mechanic could establish a wilderness farm.

But could the enterprise have been successful in the communal fashion envisioned by Haddock? The most reasonable analysis seems to be that the colony had only a remote chance of survival. The group members had virtually no frontier skills and faced gigantic difficulties. Short of dissatisfaction with their urban lot, there was no strong cohesive force holding the members together. The later immigrants to the valley had such a bond in the form of their religion, Catholicism, and their nationality. The association members themselves blamed their failure on the inaccessibility of the site. They could not or would not see any underlying defect in their program. To blame their location was a much easier solution, since it allowed them to return to their homes believing that they and their colony could have succeeded. It perhaps gave them the capacity to dream more of the same dreams of financial independence and of an Eden in the West.

A study of the Western Farm and Village Association is a good example of the results of the intensive land reform agitation during the years before the Civil War and its relation to the labor movement. This particular illustration shows important and substantive evidence of the close links between the National Reform Associa-

tion and the workingmen of the city. This is perhaps the most significant aspect of this study; the mass of labor was often inarticulate about its true feelings, and the historian must always ask whether self-proclaimed spokesmen for labor, like Evans, really did communicate workingmen's views. It is clear from this case that such idyllic visions captured the minds of a significant segment of urban American labor. William Haddock was certainly an idealist and dreamer. Yet he forged an organization of several hundred people who moved a thousand miles to unbroken wilderness in response to these dreams. The awesome willingness of the association members to make such a change shows how profoundly dissatisfied they were with their lives in the city. Through a study of the Western Farm and Village Association, the historian can see how these individuals who would otherwise be little known viewed their role in society. They clearly saw cities as parasitic, inherently evil, and unnatural. By implication their own status was also unnatural, demeaning to their true position as men. But unlike most who felt trapped in this situation, the members of the Western Farm and Village Association made a courageous attempt to change their lives.

²⁴ This community was the subject of a book by Mary E. Nilles, *Rollingstone, a Luxembourgish Village in Minnesota* (Luxembourg, 1983), who devotes a chapter to the Western Farm and Village Association. The only references in the chapter are to the *Advocate*, although much of the information appears to derive from the county histories cited above. See also [Hill], *Winona County*, 259.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS on p. 142 and 143 are from the *Western Farm and Village Advocate*, January 1, 1852, copy in Winona County Historical Society, on p. 144, from Alfred T. Andreas, *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota*, 106 (Chicago, 1874); on p. 145, from [H. H. Hill], *History of Winona County*, 205 (Chicago, 1883).





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