

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

IMPRESSIONS OF MINNESOTA IN 1849

The document printed below is a letter written by a visitor to St. Paul in the summer of 1849 in which are recorded his impressions of Minnesota after spending four weeks in the region "looking at town and country, and making observation on men and things." The letter was printed in an Ohio newspaper, the *Eaton Register* for August 30, 1849. Not long ago a copy of this number was loaned to the Minnesota Historical Society by Mr. E. A. Kees of Beulah, North Dakota.

The letter, signed by the unknown "C.," is not without considerable intrinsic interest, but it is presented to the readers of the BULLETIN principally because it typifies hundreds of reports which were sent out from the little frontier community to interested friends and relatives in the East. Some of these letters, like the one here printed, found their way into the columns of newspapers; many others were never printed and probably most of these manuscripts have been destroyed. The Minnesota Historical Society is endeavoring to find and to add to its collection of source materials letters which, whether preserved in newspapers or in their original manuscript form, have escaped the ravages of time. Obviously a considerable collection of documents of this kind would be of great value to the student who desires to picture accurately the rapidly changing conditions of life during the early pioneer period in Minnesota.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

C. TO THE EATON REGISTER, July, 22, 1849

ST. PAUL, July 22, 1849.

GENTLEMEN:— I promised you a letter from this far off region, so here it is. I have spent about four weeks in Minnesota looking at town and country, and making observation on men and

things. First, of St. Paul:— This place is situated on the east, or rather north side of the Mississippi— on a bluff bank which rises about one hundred feet above the level of the water in the stream. The site of the town is a beautiful plain surrounded with hills which are covered with here and there a scrubby oak, which gives them very much the appearance of old orchards. The population at present is about 1200. The town is entirely new; two thirds of the houses have been built this year.¹ They have sprung up, as it were, by magic, or it looks as though Aladin was here with his wonderful lamp. Although the town has thus sprung up, it is not like Solomon's temple, for the sound of many hammers are constantly heard. In St. Paul are two good hotels, one near what is termed the lower, and the other at the upper landing, distant from each other about half a mile. Those two points are the only two places where the bluff can be ascended with wagons. We have any quantity of commission houses, stores, groceries, &c. Then we have bowling saloons, billiard rooms, and all that— gaming is quite prevalent. — A good school is kept here, and we have various ministers— a Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist; one of each resides here— besides an Episcopalian who has service here every Sunday afternoon. The Catholics are the only denomination who has a Church; a rude log one with a wooden cross at one end, and a hall at the other. Services in this are in the French language. There are not very many professors in this place. We have here three printing establishments. The *Pioneer* by a Mr. Goodhue, which has lived for 3 months. In politics, this is a nondescript. They are "good Lord good Devil," not knowing whose hands they may fall in. — It has professed neutrally, but is in favor with the Democrats, and should they have a majority in the Legislature, it will be *Loco*. Next comes the "*Chronicle*," which has attained to the 8th number. — This is a Whig Journal, edited by Col. Hughes,

¹ The population of St. Paul, according to the enumeration taken by John Morgan in the summer of 1849 and submitted on July 4, was 910. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 352 (St. Paul, 1921). For an interesting account of the rapid growth of the town see the same work, 1: 250.

formerly of Ohio. Then comes the "Register," 8 weeks old. Our friend J. P. Owens is conductor of this, and you well know it is Whig. It is due to say that none of the papers have assumed a party character. But one of these establishments can live; which they will be I cannot tell.²

I have travelled some around the country, and find it rather rough and broken — the soil is not very fertile, only second rate. The country is beautiful, abounds with first rate water, springs and brooks — pure crystal streams — affording plenty of water power. The country is evidently healthy — we have plenty of stone and enough of wood for fuel. For fencing they must rely on pruenes [*pinus?*] and tamarac swamps. There are extensive regions of both, north of us. This does not promise to be a great farming country until a Sioux Treaty shall be made, and the lands on the west side of the river are acquired. At present, the good farming region is limited to an inconsiderable area. By reference to the map you will see that the St. Croix lake and Mississippi river cut the country into the form of a triangle. Let a line be drawn beginning about 8 miles above St. Anthony's Fall and running east to the St. Croix, and the triangle lying below that line embraces nearly all the good land to which the Indian title is extinguished. Across this is about 25 miles and the depth of 30 miles. Deduct about one half this for lakes, swamps, marshes, and sandhills, and the balance is the area of arable land now in market. The most desirable portions of this is claimed. West of the Miss., and south of St. Peters river, extending west to the Missouri, is a large domain of the finest country in the world. This the Indians are desirous of selling, and it will be purchased soon. Then Minnesota will be a country worthy of public attention.

² James M. Goodhue issued the first number of the *Minnesota Pioneer* on April 28, 1849. The *Minnesota Chronicle*, which first appeared on May 31, 1849, was edited by James Hughes; and John P. Owens was the editor of the *Minnesota Register*, which was first issued in Cincinnati, Ohio, on April 27, 1849. The first Minnesota issue appeared on July 14, 1849. The two latter newspapers were combined and on August 25, 1849, the first number of the *Chronicle and Register* was printed. Daniel S. B. Johnston, "Minnesota Journalism in the Territorial Period," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 247, 253-256 (part 1).

In this region we have several thriving villages; the principal are Stillwater and St. Anthony. Stillwater is situated at the head of Lake St. Croix, 25 miles from the Mississippi. It has about 600 inhabitants and is principally sustained by the lumber business which is done up the St. Croix river. It is a pleasant thriving place, 18 miles east of this. St. Anthony has about 300 population, is nine miles west of this at the Fall.³ It is pleasantly situated, and the immense water power will tend to build it up. Quite a number of people reside around Fort Snelling, a strong fort 6 miles above here in the fork at the confluence of the Miss. and St. Peters rivers. St. Peters is a navigable stream — a considerable trade is carried on up this river. Immediately below the mouth of St. Peters is the town of Hon. H. H. Sibley, delegate to Congress from this territory — it is the establishment of the American Fur Company, and is now called Mendota; it is improving some. This place was settled about 30 years ago, about the same time that Fort Snelling was established. — The lumber business and Indian trade is the main business of the country. Lumbering business amounts to about \$200,000 per year — Indian annuities are very heavy. The amount of goods imported into this country, amounts to about \$600,000 per annum. White and half-white population of the territory about 5,000.

The election for the first Legislative Assembly will come off on the 1st day of August. The aspirants are now busy electioneering — nine Councilmen and 18 delegates compose the first assembly. I think it will be democratic.⁴ The French here will be Loco, and what the Dutch are in Ohio, these ignorant wretches will be here, — tools in the hands of Loco demagogues. We have more little great men here than any place I ever saw. We have more fence men — trade politicians — who are in the market at the highest bidder. Then we have quite a number of pseudo-sages, who think it wise to observe a neutral position. Sibley

³ The census of 1849 credited Stillwater with 609 inhabitants and St. Anthony with 248. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 352.

⁴ No political party was organized in Minnesota before the first territorial legislature convened. The first "Democratic mass convention," which Dr. Folwell terms "the beginning of party organization in Minnesota," occurred on October 20, 1849. *Minnesota*, 1: 369.

is the leader of that genus. They say, that as Congress will be Loco in one branch and Whig in the other, that the best position of the territory is to remain neutral. If Congress will not grant the territory its rights because of its politics, then they had better go home, for the Lord is done with them. I have much more that I would like to write, but my limits forbid. Things are dull — we have had very hot weather and plenty of musquitoes.

With my best wishes for the good people of Eaton, and a hope that I may see you all again.

C.



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