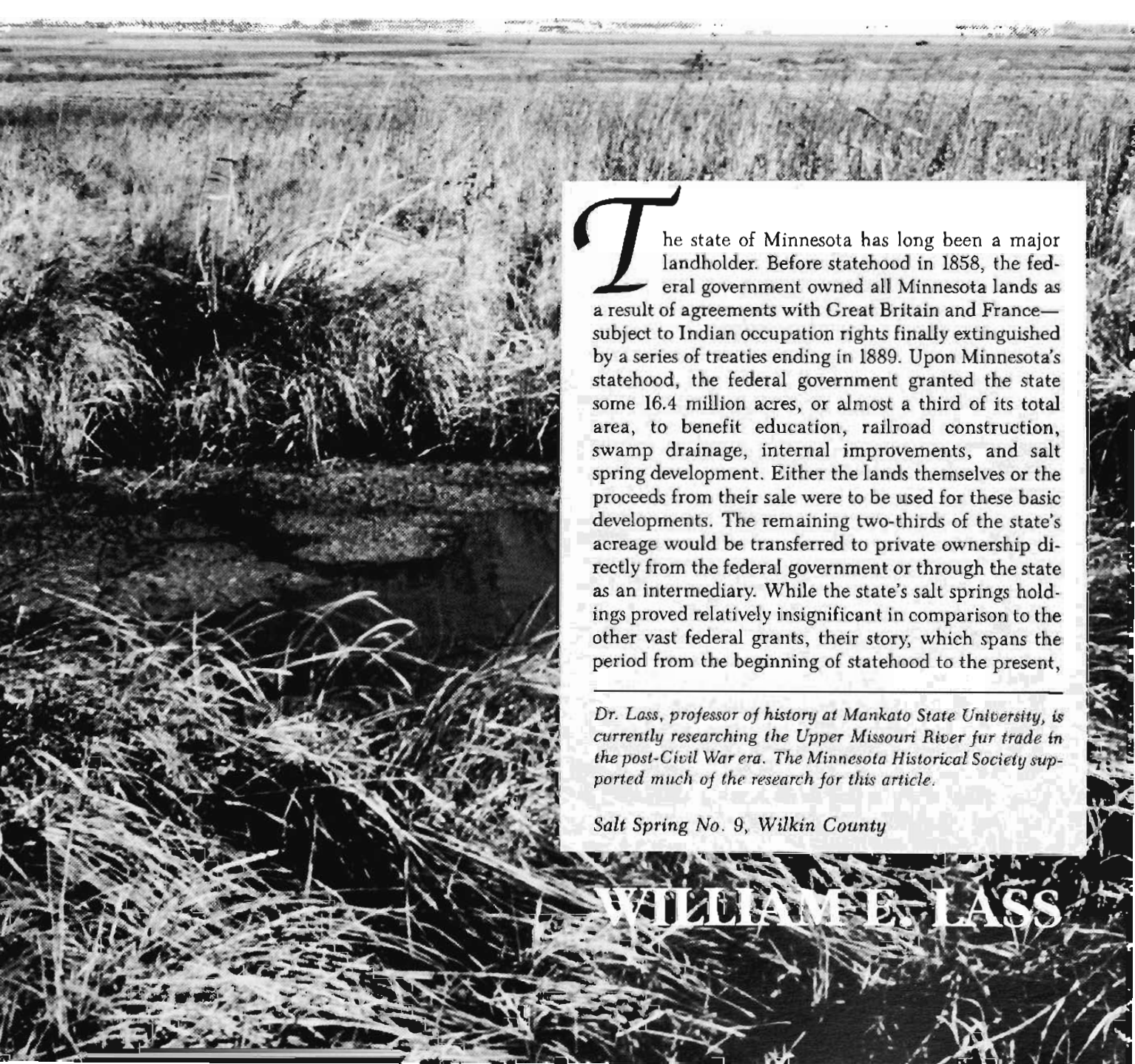


# MINNESOTA'S SALT LANDS SAGA



**T**he state of Minnesota has long been a major landholder. Before statehood in 1858, the federal government owned all Minnesota lands as a result of agreements with Great Britain and France—subject to Indian occupation rights finally extinguished by a series of treaties ending in 1889. Upon Minnesota's statehood, the federal government granted the state some 16.4 million acres, or almost a third of its total area, to benefit education, railroad construction, swamp drainage, internal improvements, and salt spring development. Either the lands themselves or the proceeds from their sale were to be used for these basic developments. The remaining two-thirds of the state's acreage would be transferred to private ownership directly from the federal government or through the state as an intermediary. While the state's salt springs holdings proved relatively insignificant in comparison to the other vast federal grants, their story, which spans the period from the beginning of statehood to the present,

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*Dr. Lass, professor of history at Mankato State University, is currently researching the Upper Missouri River fur trade in the post-Civil War era. The Minnesota Historical Society supported much of the research for this article.*

*Salt Spring No. 9, Wilkin County*

**WILLIAM E. LASS**

reveals an ongoing aspect of the almost forgotten legislation that created the state.<sup>1</sup>

In early 1857 when Congress first considered the bill authorizing the people of Minnesota to form a constitution and state government, the House Committee on Territories made a salt springs land grant to the proposed state based, in part, on the widespread expectation that productive salt springs would soon be discovered there. Vague reports by early explorers and survey parties suggested that Minnesota might have naturally occurring salt, essential for preserving meat before the age of refrigeration. In the mid-1850s, the ballyhooed formation of St. Cloud's Minnesota Salt Company and hyperbolic newspaper publicity about a rich salt lake northwest of the city where crystallized salt could be gathered in bushels made the development of salt springs appear a virtual certainty.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of reserving salt lands for the public predated the Ordinance of 1785—which established a scientific system of subdividing western lands into sections and acres—but was not included in that early legislation. However, the idea of assuring public access to such an important and costly commodity as salt soon became popular. In 1803 Ohio received the first salt springs land grant. With the creation of Michigan in 1837, Congress standardized the size of the grant at seventy-two sections or 46,080 acres.<sup>3</sup>

As approved on February 26, 1857, Minnesota's enabling act provided "that all salt springs within said State, not exceeding twelve in number, with six sections of land adjoining, or as contiguous as may be to each, shall be granted to said state for its use." The law reserved the springs for direct use by the state but allowed them to be "disposed of on such terms, conditions, and regulations as the legislature shall direct." Thus, proceeds from their sale could be used to defray the costs of commercial development of the springs. Finally, the act required the first governor to select the salt springs lands within one year of Minnesota's admission to the Union.<sup>4</sup>

About six weeks after statehood, Minnesota's first governor, Henry H. Sibley, acted promptly to claim the state lands provided by the legislation. He contacted Thomas A. Hendricks, commissioner of the United States General Land Office, about the procedure to follow in selecting salt and swamp lands as well as land for public buildings and schools. In July and August 1858, Sibley and Hendricks corresponded, met in Washington, D.C., and finally agreed upon the methods of identifying Minnesota's salt and other lands in surveyed and unsurveyed areas. The impending transfer of thousands of acres from the federal government to the state of Minnesota was well covered by newspapers in Washington, D.C., New York City, and Minnesota, further encouraging the impression that Minne-

sota surely had valuable salt lands waiting to be claimed.<sup>5</sup>

While negotiating with Hendricks, Sibley also began organizing a survey party to find the state's allotted twelve salt springs and claim the associated seventy-two sections of salt springs lands. Since the Minnesota Salt Company regarded the area near Devils Lake, between the Sheyenne and Souris rivers, as offering the region's best salt spring sites and since the state's western boundary was the Red River, Sibley correctly reasoned that Minnesota's most likely salt spring locations would be in the Red River valley.<sup>6</sup>

To head his land-claims expedition Sibley selected twenty-seven-year-old James D. Skinner, a St. Paul civil engineer and land surveyor. Skinner had attended Yale College and entered the legal profession before his "natural taste for mathematics" turned him toward engineering. His appointment made sense, since he was to select and mark by conventional surveying methods both salt lands and public buildings lands granted in the enabling act. Skinner's lack of background in chemistry and geology, however, would handicap his efforts to analyze the quality of the salt springs he encountered. As for the governor, Sibley seems to have been more interested in claiming valuable lands for the state rather than in finding the best salt springs. Evidently, he did not try to add a trained chemist or geologist to Skinner's party and did not even order Skinner to collect salt springs water samples that could be analyzed later.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Here and below, see Samuel T. Dana, John H. Allison, and Russell N. Cunningham, *Minnesota Lands: Ownership, Use, and Management of Forest and Related Lands* (Washington, D.C.: American Forestry Association, 1960), xv-xvi.

<sup>2</sup>*Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 3d sess., 1857, p. 517; William E. Lass, "Minnesota's Quest for Salt," *Minnesota History* 52 (Winter 1990): 130, 132-33, 136.

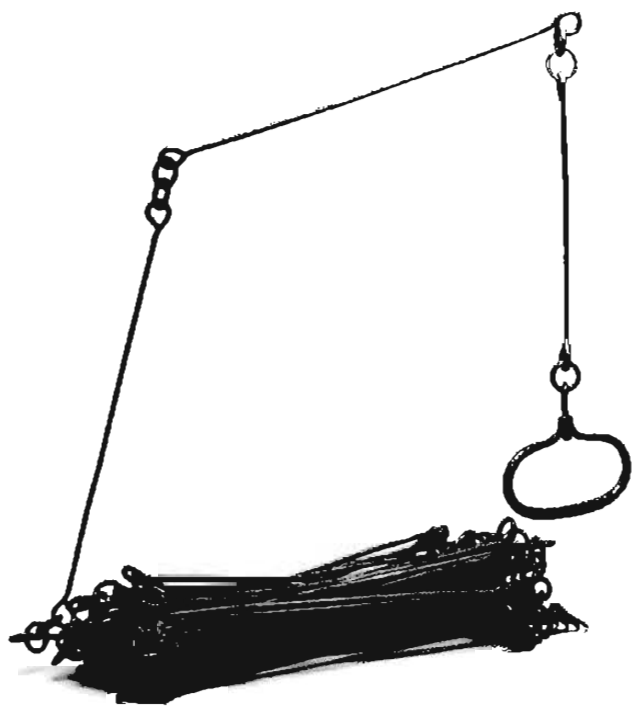
<sup>3</sup>Matthias N. Orfield, *Federal Land Grants to the States with Special Reference to Minnesota*, University of Minnesota Studies in the Social Sciences, no. 2 (Minneapolis, 1915), 64, 66.

<sup>4</sup>United States, *Statutes at Large* (1857), 11:167. Skinner probably later gave the highest spring numbers to these most northerly springs because the rectilinear land survey system assigns township designations from south to north.

<sup>5</sup>Sibley to Hendricks, June 29, 1858, Letters Received, Federal Civilian Agencies, Henry H. Sibley, Governor's Records, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); Sibley to Hendricks, Aug. 17, 1858, Executive Journal A, 43, Governor's Records, State Archives; *Pioneer & Democrat* (St. Paul), Aug. 15, 19, 1858.

<sup>6</sup>Here and below, see "List of individuals composing the party despatched by the Governor . . . August 23, 1858," Accounts—Salt Lands Commission, Sibley, Governor's Records; Sibley's instructions to land commissioners, Aug. 23, 1858, Executive Journal A, 45-48, Governor's Records.

<sup>7</sup>*Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), April 24, 1881.



*Nineteenth-century surveyor's chain,  
measuring sixty-six feet long*

Preoccupied with claiming land, Sibley managed to make Skinner's expedition little more than a surveying party. He hired Robert Boyle and William C. Johnson, about whom little is known, as co-commissioners at the salary of \$3.00 a day each, the same as Skinner's reimbursement, and added Adam Scheringer and William E. Beall as surveyor's chain-and-axemen at the daily rate of \$1.50 each. Sibley expected Skinner to hire his own teamsters for hauling supplies and to add a guide-interpreter to his group.<sup>8</sup>

ON AUGUST 23, shortly after he had completed his negotiations with Hendricks, Sibley wrote detailed instructions for Skinner's expedition. He asked the party first to report land that would be desirable to fulfill the "few thousand acres" remaining in the state's allocation of "State University lands." Then he requested the commissioners select ten sections of public buildings lands near the site of the contemplated new state capital in Kandiyohi County. These lands, located "at the nearest and most convenient point to the Settlements," were to be chosen "not only with reference to their fertility, but also with a view to beauty of location."

<sup>8</sup>Here and four paragraphs below, see Sibley's instructions to land commissioners, Aug. 23, 1858, Executive Journal A, 45-48, Governor's Records.

To preclude later encroachment by settlers on the selected salt springs lands, Sibley carefully described the methods to be used in marking them. In timbered areas, each spring was to be marked by four posts at least three feet high set in the cardinal directions near the springs. The bearings from each post were to be taken on at least two trees appropriately blazed with an ax. Four additional posts were to be located in the cardinal directions one hundred chains (6,600 feet) from the spring's center. Additional lines two hundred chains long were to be run due north-south or east-west from each of these posts to four corner posts. Thus, the identifying lines, clearly blazed and marked, would demark four tracts, one hundred chains square, each with the salt spring at its center. In open country, Sibley continued, stone or sod mounds would replace posts and blazed lines.

In addition to surveying the salt springs sites, Sibley admonished the commissioners to "note a full description of the quality and nature of the soil, timber, &c. of the land so marked out, together with any other natural objects that would be of value or importance to be known in view of prospective settlement." Furthermore, he wrote, "The springs should be located as near as possible to some one or more known lakes, rivers or streams . . . so that they may be easily found." Attuned to the great public interest in Minnesota's salt prospects, Sibley cautioned Skinner and his associates to "be very careful to keep your proceedings and your discoveries confined strictly to your own party, that no advantage may be taken by others of the result of your labors, to the detriment of the interests of the State."

Sibley's anxiety about selecting the salt springs lands before the one-year deadline on May 11, 1859, dominated his instructions. He ordered the commissioners "to move with all practicable celerity" in order to complete their work on the remote prairies before the onset of winter. Also concerned about their ability to cope with unknown country and Indians, Sibley warned Skinner that his guide-interpreter had to be a man "sufficiently conversant with the Indian languages, to be able to explain to any roving bands of Savages, you may chance to fall in with, the objects and aim of your expedition."

Unfortunately for the expedition, Skinner had trouble filling the guide-interpreter position, and delays in finding a competent person forced him to leave St. Paul on September 5 with only his surveyors and a teamster driving a four-mule-team wagon. His first destination was Forest City (near Litchfield in Meeker County), where he intended to enlist the services of the land office in claiming the public buildings lands. Leading his men northwestward along the Mississippi River to a point opposite the mouth of the Clearwater River, Skinner crossed the Mississippi and, with great diffi-

culty, began traveling the twenty-seven miles southwesterly to Forest City. He later swore, "Our mules were utterly incompetent to go through the big woods, the mud being hub deep & the stumps without number. I never saw so bad a road."<sup>9</sup>

Only after acquiring two yoke of oxen to drag his mules and wagon through the morass did Skinner finally reach his destination—a full week after leaving St. Paul. Although his party had passed through settled areas between St. Paul and Forest City, Skinner complained, "We feel the want of a guide very much. . . . Our party are all green in Camp life with the exception of one or two but we do very well under the circumstances."

Skinner's belated departure from St. Paul without adequate intelligence of the salt springs region and without a guide forced Sibley to get involved personally

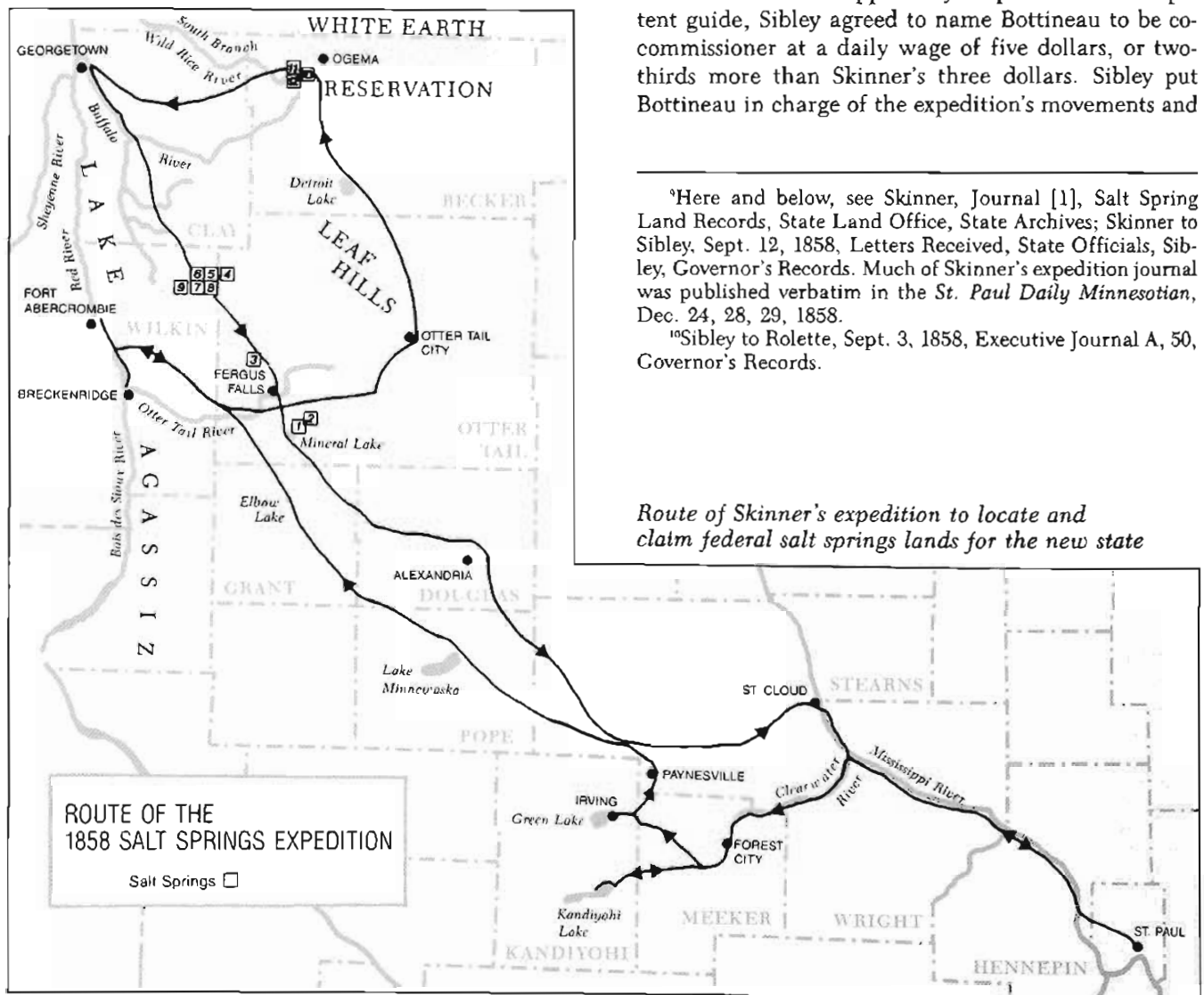
in gathering additional information and securing a guide-interpreter. Through two of his former fur trade associates, Norman W. Kittson and Joseph Rolette (the Younger), Sibley believed there to be a salt springs area in extreme northwestern Minnesota, and he asked Rolette to claim and mark it for the state. Aware of the trader's association with the much publicized but still inactive Minnesota Salt Company, Sibley hoped to exploit Rolette's intimate knowledge of the Red River valley. If he knew of such a salt spring, however, he apparently never attempted to comply with this request by the governor.<sup>10</sup>

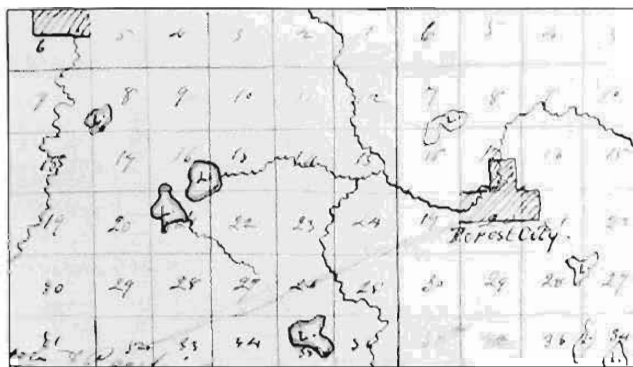
Not until three weeks after Skinner's group had departed St. Paul did Sibley hire the well-known mixed-blood scout Pierre Bottineau as its guide-interpreter. Intimately acquainted with the Red River valley, the forty-year-old Bottineau had guided Isaac I. Stevens's Northern Pacific Railroad expedition in 1853 and the party that claimed the townsite of Breckenridge on the Red River in 1857. Apparently desperate for a competent guide, Sibley agreed to name Bottineau to be co-commissioner at a daily wage of five dollars, or two-thirds more than Skinner's three dollars. Sibley put Bottineau in charge of the expedition's movements and

<sup>9</sup>Here and below, see Skinner, Journal [1], Salt Spring Land Records, State Land Office, State Archives; Skinner to Sibley, Sept. 12, 1858, Letters Received, State Officials, Sibley, Governor's Records. Much of Skinner's expedition journal was published verbatim in the *St. Paul Daily Minnesotian*, Dec. 24, 28, 29, 1858.

<sup>10</sup>Sibley to Rolette, Sept. 3, 1858, Executive Journal A, 50, Governor's Records.

*Route of Skinner's expedition to locate and claim federal salt springs lands for the new state*





*Detail of field map from Skinner's journal  
showing public buildings lands  
in Meeker County*

Skinner in charge of the land surveys. The cost-conscious governor then gave Bottineau an order terminating the services of Boyle and Johnson.<sup>11</sup>

UNAWARE OF THIS CHANGE, Skinner, Boyle, and Johnson had claimed some public buildings lands in Kandiyohi County and hurriedly begun the long northwesterly march to Fort Abercrombie and Breckenridge on the Red River. There they hoped to obtain fresh provisions, a guide, and information about salt springs. After leaving the last settlement northwest of Paynesville (in southwestern Stearns County), the group followed a section of the Old Middle Trail used by Manitoba-bound ox carts, passing by White Bear Lake (now Lake Minnewaska), Elbow Lake, Lightning Lake, and the two Otter Tail River crossings. In describing the

terrain, Skinner, a transplanted easterner, revealed his affinity for timbered areas. He labeled the twenty-two-mile stretch from the last Otter Tail crossing to the Red River as "a most dreary and uninviting prairie. Not a solitary pond, tree, or shrub is found in traversing this desolate trace over which it is necessary to carry both wood and water."<sup>12</sup>

On Minnesota's western border, Skinner visited the townsite of Breckenridge and purchased groceries, meals, and sundries at nearby Fort Abercrombie. Again he failed in the all-important tasks of finding a guide-interpreter and a "Mr. Taylor," who purportedly knew the whereabouts of some salt springs. Learning that Taylor had recently left Breckenridge for Otter Tail Lake, Skinner hurried eastward to overtake him. En route his party met Bottineau a short distance west of the straggling settlement of Otter Tail City, which, despite being the seat of Otter Tail County and the site of a United States district land office, consisted of five log cabins. Skinner and Bottineau never found Taylor, but the land office's deputy surveyor and some Ojibway Indians camped nearby told them about four or five salt springs. After discharging Boyle and Johnson, who may have been either reluctant or relieved to depart, Skinner and Bottineau immediately set out to the northwest along a Red River trail connecting Crow Wing and Pembina.<sup>13</sup>

Passing Detroit Lake, Skinner and Bottineau followed two Red River trails to the South Branch of the Wild Rice River. In open prairie slightly northwest of the trail crossing (now in Becker County, six miles southwest of Ogema on the White Earth Reservation) they found three salt springs ranging from six to thirty feet in diameter. Skinner enthusiastically, if ignorantly,

<sup>11</sup>Sibley to Bottineau, Sept. 25, 1858, and Sibley to Skinner, Johnson, and Boyle, Sept. 25, 1858, Executive Journal A, 53, Governor's Records; Statement of payment to Bottineau, Nov. 26, 1858, Accounts—Salt Lands Commission, Sibley, Governor's Records. For biographical information on Bottineau, see MHS Scrapbooks, 2:94, 7:23, 9:31–33, MHS library, and Daniel S. B. Johnston, "A Red River Townsite Speculation in 1857," in *Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul, 1915), 15:411 (hereafter *MHS Collections*).

<sup>12</sup>Skinner, Journal, [2–7, 8].

<sup>13</sup>Statement of miscellaneous expenses made by salt land commissioners, Nov. 27, 1858, Accounts—Salt Lands Commission, Sibley, Governor's Records; Skinner, Journal, [9–10]; John W. Mason, ed., *History of Otter Tail County* (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen, 1916), 1:82, 84, 96; Skinner to Sibley, Oct. 3, 1858, and Skinner and Bottineau to Sibley, Oct. 6, 1858, both in Miscellaneous Trust Fund Lands Lists and Correspondence, State Land Office, State Archives. Skinner may have been referring to James W. Taylor, the publicist for St. Paul expansionists who wanted to add Rupert's Land, Canada, to the United States.

#### *Lake Minnewaska in Pope County, about 1853*







*The Red River of the North, probably in Clay County, about 1872*

noted, "Their waters were much more highly impregnated with salt than were those of the lakes which they fed, thus clearly proving their distinctive character as salt springs." On his map, Skinner later numbered these springs 10, 11, and 12. Located on unsurveyed, unceded Ojibway Indian lands, these three springs posed special problems. Because their exact location could not be related to existing townships and sections, Skinner and his two assistants, Beall and Scheringer, spent three full days surveying and marking the six sections of land claimed for each spring.<sup>14</sup>

With the completion of this work on October 18 in the expedition's seventh week, the party moved generally westward to the confluence of the Buffalo, Sheyenne, and Red rivers (near present-day Georgetown). In deference to Sibley's interest in agricultural lands, Skinner did not bother to search for salt springs but instead laid over a day so that he could examine the area's farming potential.

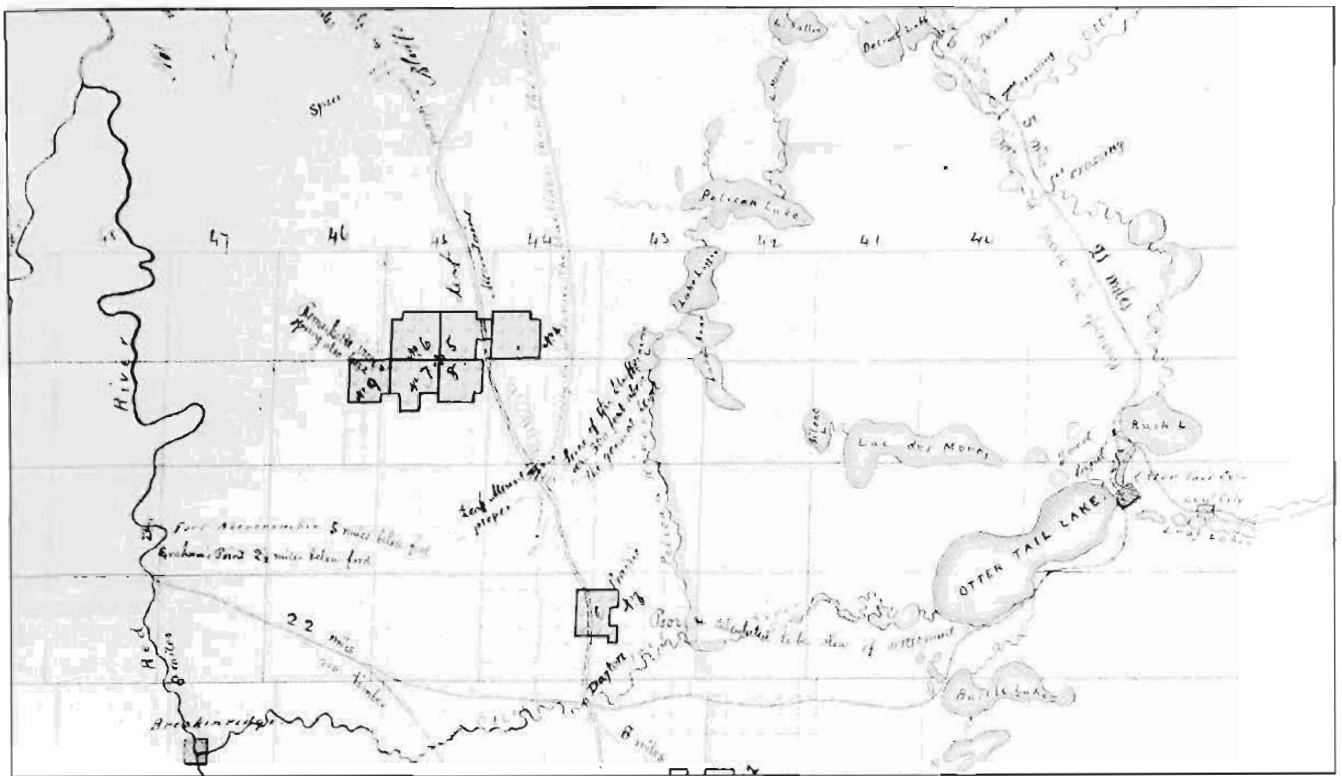
Proceeding southeastward to a Red River trail, Skinner and Bottineau then followed it to a salt springs area that the land official in Otter Tail City had described. After establishing their base camp near the western edge of the Leaf Hills, Otter Tail County's glacial moraines, they reconnoitered the flat prairie to the west. On treeless land that was once part of Glacial Lake Agassiz, they found four presumed salt springs in swampy terrain, which Skinner described as "salt marshes," about one mile southeast of present-day Lawndale (in northeastern Wilkin County). Designated

numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8, the springs sat near the corners of four adjoining sections. These springs, with their accompanying six sections each, burdened the state with some land that had absolutely no potential for agriculture.

Skinner's greatest thrill came when he discovered Spring No. 9 three miles west of the swampy cluster. On the top of a low, gradually sloping hillock, which rose only forty to fifty feet above the surrounding flat prairie, Skinner found a prominent spring rimmed by deposits of what he called "hard Bog Iron Ore." Obviously more impressed by these traces of iron than by the small salt springs on the same rise, Skinner grandly collected iron specimens and later submitted them to Sibley, something he neglected to do with saltwater samples.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Here and below, see Skinner, Journal, [13-17]; "Map of Western Minnesota . . . Showing the Salt Spring and Public Building Lands . . . 1858," Maps: Miscellaneous, State Land Office, State Archives; sworn statement of Skinner and Bottineau, Nov. 27, 1858, Salt Spring Land Records.

<sup>15</sup>Here and two paragraphs below, see Skinner, Journal, [18-19]. In October 1988, the author inspected the sites of Spring Nos. 1-9. Only Spring No. 9 has remained essentially unaltered since Skinner's day. The low hilltop on which it is located has never been cultivated but is used for cattle grazing. The spring's waters rise from a seemingly bottomless pool about twenty feet in diameter. Reddish deposits of iron oxide border the pool and the rivulets of spring water that flow down the slopes.



Detail of "Map of Western Minnesota..." showing salt springs lands in Otter Tail and Wilkin counties

While returning to their camp, Skinner and Bottineau found yet another spring in rolling prairie land near the Leaf Hills. They claimed it as Spring No. 4, thereby finding six of the requisite twelve springs and claiming half the state's entitled salt springs lands in an eight-mile stretch along a township line.

Now homeward bound from the Leaf Hills, they claimed their tenth spring, No. 3, and its six sections of land several miles north of the Otter Tail River and, after surveying it, hurried southeastward to a large salt lake about which Ojibway Indians had told them. By this time November had arrived. The oxen had become "enfeebled" and malnourished, and Skinner worried about the possibility of an early winter storm. By chance they met an Ojibway man who had processed salt the previous winter at the lake they now sought, and with this new guide they reached the unnamed lake (later Mineral Lake) about eight miles east of the Otter Tail River crossing.

There, Skinner and Bottineau found two salt springs feeding the lake, which they claimed as numbers 1 and 2. Skinner regarded this lake as his greatest salt discovery. He found its waters "strongly impreg-

nated with salt" and, in a statement revealing of his appraisal methods, emphasized, "Indeed more strongly impregnated than any I had yet tasted."<sup>16</sup>

ONLY IGNORANCE permitted Skinner to select the state's salt springs on the basis of taste rather than chemical analysis. Salt springs frequently produced solutions containing not just the desired sodium chloride, but gypsum, magnesium, iron, and other minerals common to the geological formations found in the Red River valley. Yet Skinner apparently had no reservations about his method, and his conduct seems to have satisfied Governor Sibley, who never questioned the quality of the springs claimed. For Sibley, they were insignificant compared to the state's opportunity to claim 46,080 acres of land.<sup>17</sup>

On November 7, when four inches of snow fell on Skinner's party, he recognized a warning of "the necessity of proceeding homeward without delay." Noting in his journal that his party's "provisions [were] even almost exhausted," Skinner broke up camp on the morning of November 8, and the party "commenced our homeward journey along the new State Road via Alexander [sic] . . . and St. Cloud," finally arriving in St. Paul on November 25, 1858, twelve weeks after its hasty departure.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Skinner, Journal, [21].

<sup>17</sup>Lass, "Quest for Salt," 133.

<sup>18</sup>Skinner, Journal, [21].

*Received A. Paul, March 23, 1859, of Henry H. Sibley, for the State of Minnesota, for the purpose of the expedition to select State lands.*

*Reimbursement receipt, signed by Skinner, for a horse injured on the expedition*

Soon after, Skinner and Bottineau made a sworn statement giving legal descriptions of the surveyed lands claimed for Spring Nos. 1–9 and describing the unsurveyed lands claimed for Spring Nos. 10–12. At that time Skinner also gave Sibley an abstract of his journal. Sibley discharged Bottineau in late November, but Skinner worked into January 1859 to complete the final draft of his journal and its accompanying map.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, Sibley began action to assure the state's control over the salt springs lands. Several days after receiving the sworn deposition, he sent an inventory of the lands on surveyed tracts to the district land office in Otter Tail City and requested that the lands be marked on maps as owned by the state and therefore reserved from private claims. Sibley then asked Hendricks at the General Land Office to instruct the district office that the salt springs lands were reserved for the state. As for the eighteen claimed sections adjacent to Spring Nos. 10, 11, and 12, Sibley acknowledged that the state could not make a valid claim on lands that had not yet been ceded by the Indians. Nevertheless, he asked that the sections be designated state lands pending such a treaty agreement. Most significantly and of lasting consequence, Sibley did not request the immediate title transfer of the salt springs lands to the state, evidently believing this could be accomplished routinely at a later time. Complying with Sibley's request in mid-December 1858, Hendricks simply ordered the land officers in Otter Tail City to reserve the salt lands for eventual ownership by the state.<sup>20</sup>

DESPITE HEAVY newspaper publicity in St. Paul, the Skinner expedition failed to stimulate any immediate private interest in either developing the newly discovered salt springs or purchasing salt springs lands. The nationwide panic of 1857 had shattered nascent Minnesota businesses, including the much-heralded Minnesota Salt Company, leaving the new state bereft of any

investment capital. State officials apparently never contemplated public development of the salt springs, but even if they had, the government's meager resources would have precluded such action.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the state could find no market for its salt lands in the months and years after Skinner's expedition because of their remoteness from settlement. This isolation, combined with the depressed economy, probably explains Governor Sibley's and his successors' peculiar failure to have the salt springs lands officially transferred to the state.

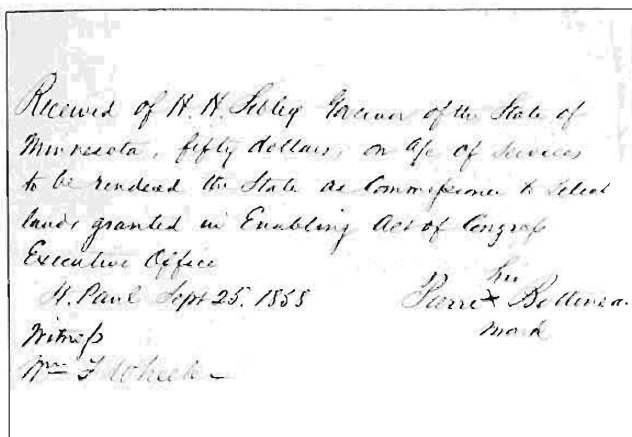
Subsequent dramatic events further delayed settlement of the salt lands area. The Dakota War of 1862, fear of further Indian attacks, and the Civil War effec-

<sup>19</sup>Abstract of Skinner's journal, Nov. 27, 1858, Salt Spring Land Records; statement of payment to Pierre Bottineau, Nov. 26, 1858, and statements of payment to Skinner, Nov. 27, 1858, Jan. 27, 1859, both in Accounts—Salt Lands Commission, Sibley, Governor's Records. Skinner's survey notes detailing the location of the twelve selected salt springs are in Salt Lands & Springs & Swamplands, Jan.–July 1871, Horace H. Austin, Governor's Records, State Archives. The locations of the nine springs Skinner and Bottineau found on surveyed land and the land selected for each were as follows: *Spring No. 1*: SE corner of SE quarter of Section 6, T 131 N, R 42 W. Selected lands: Section 6 and west half of Section 5, T 131 N, R 42 W; West half of Section 32 and Section 31, T 132 N, R 42 W; Sections 1 and 2, T 131 N, R 43 W and Section 35, T 132 N, Range 43 W. *Spring No. 2*: NE corner of NE quarter of Section 7, T 131 N, R 42 W. Selected lands: Sections 7, 18, west half of 8, west half of 17, T 131 N, R 42 W; Sections 12, 13, and east half of 11 and 14, T 131 N, R 43 W. *Spring No. 3*: Section 12, T 133 N, R 44 W. Selected lands: Sections 12, 13, and north half of 24, T 133 N, R 44 W; Sections 7, 18, North half of 19, west half of 8, west half of 20, T 133 N, R 43 W. *Spring No. 4*: Near center of Section 32, T 136 N, R 44 W. Selected lands: Sections 29, 30, 31, 32, west half of 28 and 33, south half of 19 and 20, T 136 N, R 44 W. Springs 5–8 were all located at the corners of Sections 33 and 34, T 136 N and Sections 3 and 4, T 135 N, both R 45 W. *Spring No. 5*: Northeast spring. Selected lands: Sections 25, 26, 27, 34, 35 and south half of 22 and 23, T 136 N, R 45 W. *Spring No. 6*: Northwest spring. Selected lands: Sections 28, 29, 32, 33, south half of 20 and 21, east half of 30 and 31, T 136 N, R 45 W. *Spring No. 7*: Southwest spring. Selected lands: Sections 4, 5, 8, 9, 17, and east half of 6 and 7, T 135 N, R 45 W. *Spring No. 8*: Southeast spring. Selected lands: Sections 2, 3, 10, 11, west half of 1 and 12, and north half of 14 and 15, T 135 N, R 45 W. *Spring No. 9*: On range line 45 and 46, T 135 N, 24 chains, 11 links north (slightly over a quarter mile) of Sections 1 and 12, R 46. Selected lands: Sections 1, 2, 11, 12 and north half of 13 and 14, T 135 N, R 46 W; West half of 6 and 7, T 135 N, R 45 W.

<sup>20</sup>Sibley to register and receiver, Otter Tail City district land office, Nov. 30, 1858, and Sibley to Hendricks, Dec. 1, 1858, both in Executive Journal A, 67, Governor's Records; Hendricks to register and receiver, Otter Tail City district land office, Dec. 14, 1858, and Hendricks to Sibley, Dec. 14, 1858, both in Miscellaneous Trust Fund Land Lists and Correspondence, State Land Office.

<sup>21</sup>Here and below, see Lass, "Quest for Salt," 136.





Bottineau's receipt, signed with his mark



Pierre Bottineau in the late 1850s

tively checked frontier expansion for a full decade after Skinner's hasty survey expedition.

In 1868, the question of the salt springs lands was revived by Charles McIlrath, state auditor and land commissioner. Pioneer farmers had begun moving into the area of springs 1 and 2 near Mineral Lake, south-east of Fergus Falls, and at least two federal government reports contained optimistic forecasts about the salt potential of the Red River valley.

Realizing that Minnesota's salt springs lands would soon be marketable and concerned that legal ownership had never been transferred to the state, McIlrath sent an inquiry to Joseph S. Wilson, the commissioner of the United States General Land Office. Inferring that state officials had been dilatory in the salt lands matter, Wilson required McIlrath to resubmit proof of the existence of salt springs and their survey details. Even after McIlrath sent copies of the 1858 documents—including Skinner's journal, sworn deposition, and map—McIlrath had to negotiate further with the officers of the district land office in Alexandria, which then had jurisdiction for the area. Corroboration

proved to be difficult, because Sibley's land claims had burned in a fire at the old district land office in Otter Tail City in 1862.<sup>23</sup>

Lacking these original records, McIlrath and the Alexandria register set out to determine which salt lands settlers had taken over and which the state could still claim. The laborious process took two years, delaying Minnesota's first consignment of salt springs lands until January 13, 1871.<sup>23</sup>

This transfer amounted to only 26,445 acres, the land associated with the seven springs numbered 3–9. Unavailable were the thirty sections connected with Springs Nos. 1 and 2 near Mineral Lake and with Springs Nos. 10, 11, and 12 on the South Branch of the Wild Rice River. Reportedly, settlers claimed and occupied over four-fifths of the Mineral Lake lands under regular land law. According to McIlrath's calculations, the remainder of the acreage associated with these two springs had been doubly claimed by the state of Minnesota under the provisions of a congressional swamp lands grant. The eighteen more sections of Spring Nos. 10, 11, and 12 would later become part of White Earth Reservation.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Wilson to McIlrath, Nov. 25, 1868; McIlrath to Wilson, Mar. 13, 1869; McIlrath to register and receiver, Alexandria district land office, Mar. 30, 1869; McIlrath to L. K. Aaker, Sept. 18, 1869; and Aaker to McIlrath, Sept. 28, 1869—all in Salt Spring Land Records; "Annual Report of State Auditor," *Minnesota Executive Documents* (1871), 1:212 (hereafter, Auditor's Report).

<sup>24</sup>Proclamation of Joseph S. Wilson, Jan. 13, 1871, Approved Lists, vol. 6, no. 1, Salt Springs Lands, State Land Office, State Archives.

<sup>25</sup>Governor Horace Austin to Joseph S. Wilson, Jan. 26, 1871, in Executive Journal D, 558; Auditor's Report, *Minnesota Executive Documents* (1871), 1:212; Approved Lists, vol. 6, no. 1, Salt Springs Lands, State Land Office. Throughout this article, acreage figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



Charles McIlrath, state auditor and land commissioner

The state land commissioner's plans to raise revenues through salt springs land sales further ran afoul of the Belle Plaine Salt Company, organized in Scott County in 1869 amid great hoopla. Subsequent publicity claimed the springs offered Minnesota salvation from its traditional reliance on costly imported salt.

In 1870, before the state cleared title to its first salt springs lands, the lucrative development of these salt deposits appeared imminent. In the context of this optimism, the legislature granted six sections of state salt springs lands in the Fergus Falls–Lawndale area to the company to help defray the cost of developing its Belle Plaine springs. While the company's failure to strike rich brine raised the legislators' suspicions, in 1872 they nonetheless approved a second grant of six sections to the Belle Plaine firm.<sup>25</sup>

The company's complete failure to find brine, combined with investigating geologist Alexander Winchell's conclusion that Belle Plaine had no salt-bearing geological formations, ended the venture. As for the company's motives, neither contemporary nor retrospective observers have ascertained whether its backers were sincere amateurs who falsely believed they had discovered salt or scheming shysters who happily pocketed twelve sections of free land. Governor Horace Austin, among others, suspected the company of fraud and came to regard its two land grants as a major waste of state resources.

To absolve themselves of poor judgment in making land grants and to preclude the company's attempt to obtain a third grant, the legislature and Austin opted to commit the remaining salt springs lands to some useful purpose. The necessity of obtaining the services of a Michigan geologist to investigate the Belle Plaine affair had underscored the lack of geological knowledge about Minnesota. Accordingly, the 1872 legislature passed an act providing for a Minnesota Geological and Natural History Survey under the authority of the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents. "As soon as may be practicable," the law specified, the regents were to conduct "a thorough geological and natural history survey of the state." Subsequently the university hired the well-qualified Newton H. Winchell, Alexander Winchell's younger brother, to direct the survey. Newton Winchell's work, which promised to be long and costly, received special support in 1873 when the legislature transferred the remaining salt springs lands to the university's regents, who were authorized to sell the lands to support the work of the survey.<sup>26</sup>

The regents and Winchell soon realized that the only lands immediately transferable were those the state had received in 1871, less the twelve sections granted to the Belle Plaine company. Seeking to secure long-range funding for the survey, they naturally wanted title to as much land as possible, and, conse-



*Newton H. Winchell,  
director of the state's  
Geological and Natural  
History Survey*

quently, the regents instructed Winchell first to determine the status of the seventy-two sections of lands granted by the 1857 enabling act.<sup>27</sup>

To document the history of the salt springs lands, Winchell obtained copies of papers including Sibley's correspondence with the General Land Office and State Auditor McIlrath's negotiations prior to the transfer of the first salt lands. Relying heavily on McIlrath's 1871 report, Winchell calculated that after deducting the two grants to the Belle Plaine company, 18,771 acres remained for transfer to the survey. The 19,872 acres still held by the federal government were in Winchell's view, "sums lost to the state." Some 11,520 acres had become part of White Earth Reservation, 6,752 acres had been given to settlers, and 1,600 more had been claimed under a swamp lands grant. McIlrath's report, however, contained major errors about land at Spring Nos. 1 and 2, apparently basing its calculations on initial claims by settlers rather than on land finally patented. Subsequently, federal and state land officials determined that only about six of the twelve related sections had actually been occupied or otherwise claimed.<sup>28</sup>

In April 1874, Winchell presented to the regents an oral report of "carefully gathered facts and details relating to the Salt Lands due to the State of Minnesota,"

<sup>25</sup>Here and below, see Lass, "Quest for Salt," 138, 139, 140, 142.

<sup>26</sup>Minnesota, *General Laws*, 1872, 86, 1873, 255.

<sup>27</sup>Board of Regents, Minutes, April 22, 1874, University of Minnesota Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (hereafter Regents Minutes).

<sup>28</sup>*Report of Prof. N. H. Winchell Concerning the Salt Spring Lands, due to the State of Minnesota* (St. Paul, 1874), 25, 26; Auditor's Report, *Minnesota Executive Documents* (1871), 1:212.

which was then “printed for future use and reference.” This twenty-six-page pamphlet, which included collected documents and complete legal descriptions, formed the base for later efforts to obtain the salt springs lands still held by the federal government.<sup>29</sup>

Convinced of the legitimacy of its case, on December 29, 1874, the board of regents appointed two members—Governor Cushman K. Davis and Henry H. Sibley—to contact Minnesota’s congressional delegation and the secretary of the interior about the matter and to “take such other measures as to them may seem proper and expedient.”<sup>30</sup>

Davis and Sibley apparently referred the matter to Winchell, who initiated the major actions in their campaign. He drafted the memorial requesting Minnesota’s full complement of salt springs lands, passed by the legislature on February 26, 1877. Then, at the request of Governor John S. Pillsbury, he wrote the text of the proposed federal legislation sent to Minnesota’s delegation and advised Representative William S. King of Minneapolis about its final wording.<sup>31</sup>

Securing indemnity lands to compensate the state for the acreage already claimed by settlers proved anything but routine. Rather than attempt to displace people, the legislature and Governor Pillsbury approved “An Act for the Relief of Settlers on State Salt Spring Lands” on March 6, 1875. This measure relinquished to the federal government any state rights to salt springs lands already claimed by settlers. As a result the state lost at least five 160-acre parcels of Spring No. 4 lands.<sup>32</sup>

Action on the pending congressional legislation to award the indemnity lands stalled again because Congress refused to accept the state land commissioner’s report as proof of the land due the state. Accordingly, Minnesota’s Senator Samuel J. R. McMillan worked with the General Land Office to identify the standing of all Spring Nos. 1 and 2 salt lands tracts, concluding that only twenty-four instead of thirty sections were at stake. On April 12, 1878, Minnesota received the 3,398 acres of the remaining Spring Nos. 1 and 2 lands.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Regents Minutes, April 22, 1874; *Report of Prof. Winchell*, 1.

<sup>30</sup>Regents Minutes, Dec. 29, 1874.

<sup>31</sup>Winchell to Pillsbury, Mar. 6, 1876; Winchell to King, Oct. 4, Dec. 2, 1876; Draft of memorial (undated)—all in Letter Press Book, Jan. 24, 1873–April 18, 1879, N[ewton] H[orace] Winchell and Family Papers, MHS; *Senate Report*, No. 259, p. 1, 45th Cong., 2d sess., 1878 (serial 1790).

<sup>32</sup>Minnesota, *General Laws*, 1875, 124; John Schroeder to Pillsbury, [1875], Salt Spring Land Records.

<sup>33</sup>McMillan to State Land Office, Feb. 18, 1878, Salt Spring Land Records; Approved Lists, vol. 6, no. 2, Salt Springs Lands, State Land Office.

<sup>34</sup>McMillan to State Land Office, Feb. 18, 1878; *Senate Report*, No. 259, p. 6; United States, *Statutes at Large* (1879), 20:352.

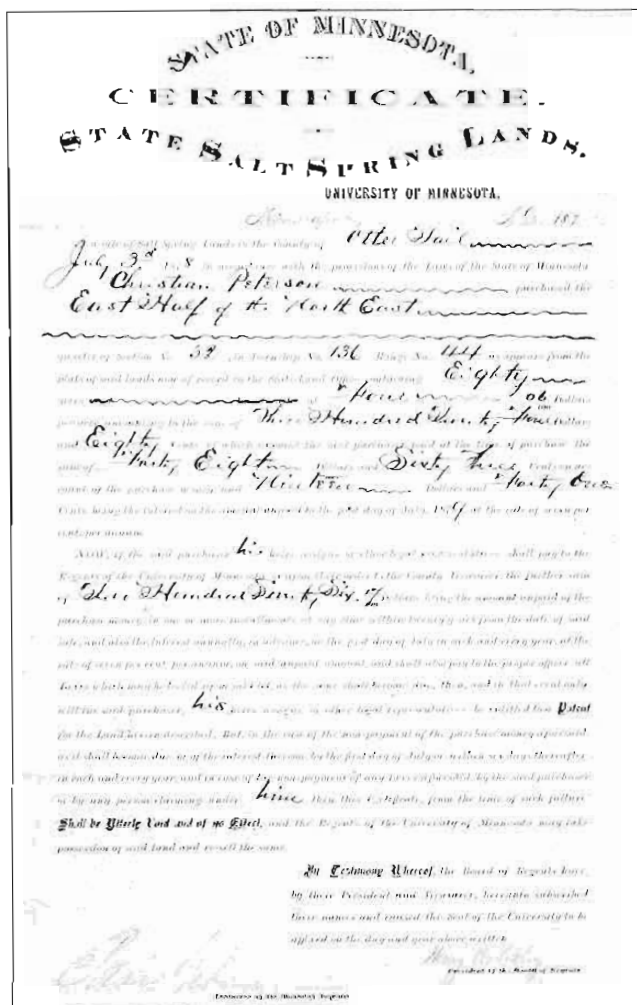
This resolution enabled Congress to deal finally with the question of indemnity lands. McMillan had introduced the indemnification bill in the Senate on October 25, 1877, and on April 16, 1878, the Senate Committee on Public Lands recommended that Minnesota be compensated for the loss to settlers of thirty sections. On March 3, 1879, Congress approved “An Act granting lands to the State of Minnesota in lieu of certain lands heretofore granted to said State,” which specified that Minnesota would forego its claims to the lost lands associated with Spring Nos. 1, 2, 10, 11, and 12 and in their stead be given indemnity lands.<sup>34</sup>

By 1879 few Minnesotans clung to the hope that any quantity of salt would be found in the state. Thus, the indemnity lands, although they continued to be identified as “salt springs lands,” had nothing to do with their salt-bearing potential. Henceforth, the state selected its lands from the public domain with other considerations in mind.

Because the General Land Office insisted that all indemnity selections be clearly identified with a num-



Brass compass, manufactured about 1856 and used by surveyor B. Densmore of Red Wing



Christian Peterson's 1878 certificate for purchase of salt springs lands from the University of Minnesota

bered spring and specific tracts chosen in 1858, their certification proved to be time-consuming. The added frustrations of reconciling settlers' conflicting claims through several district land offices delayed the transfer of indemnity lands for another six years after the passage of the 1879 law.<sup>35</sup> Finally, on April 6, 1885, the federal government transferred more than ten thousand indemnity acres in western Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, Lac Qui Parle, Big Stone, and Traverse counties to the state auditor, who had long since given up his 1877–78 challenge to the 1873 law granting the lands to the regents. In his capacity as state land commissioner, the auditor certified the lands and then assigned them to the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents.<sup>36</sup>

WHILE THE LENGTHY indemnity lands issue did not resolve itself until 1885, university regents had wasted no time in selling the undisputed salt springs lands. Starting in Otter Tail County, a committee of

three evaluated land in forty-acre tracts, characterizing each piece in terms such as "good plow land," "swampy," or "floating bog." After establishing prices ranging from \$4.00 to \$6.00 per acre, it sold the lands at public auction or through agents. By the end of 1878, the regents had sold three thousand acres at an average of \$5.80 an acre.<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with the precedent of school lands sales, the regents accepted a downpayment and terms. Their agreement with Christian Peterson in 1878 proved typical. Peterson bought eighty acres at \$4.06 per acre for a total of \$324.80, paying at the time of purchase \$48.63 in principal and \$19.41 in interest (7 percent on the balance for one year). On a standard University of Minnesota certificate for "State Salt Spring Lands," Peterson agreed to pay the remainder in "one or more installments" over a twenty-year period at 7 percent per annum. Nonpayment on Peterson's part entitled the regents to repossess and resell the land.<sup>38</sup>

The next year the regents began disposing of lands in Wilkin County. Rather than conduct a public sale, they hired Halour G. Stordock, a partner in a Rothsay general merchandise store and a dealer in real estate to act as their agent on the belief he could secure advantageous prices. Fully satisfied, they used other local agents in Lincoln, Yellow Medicine, Lac Qui Parle, Big Stone, and Traverse counties, not completing these sales until 1900.<sup>39</sup>

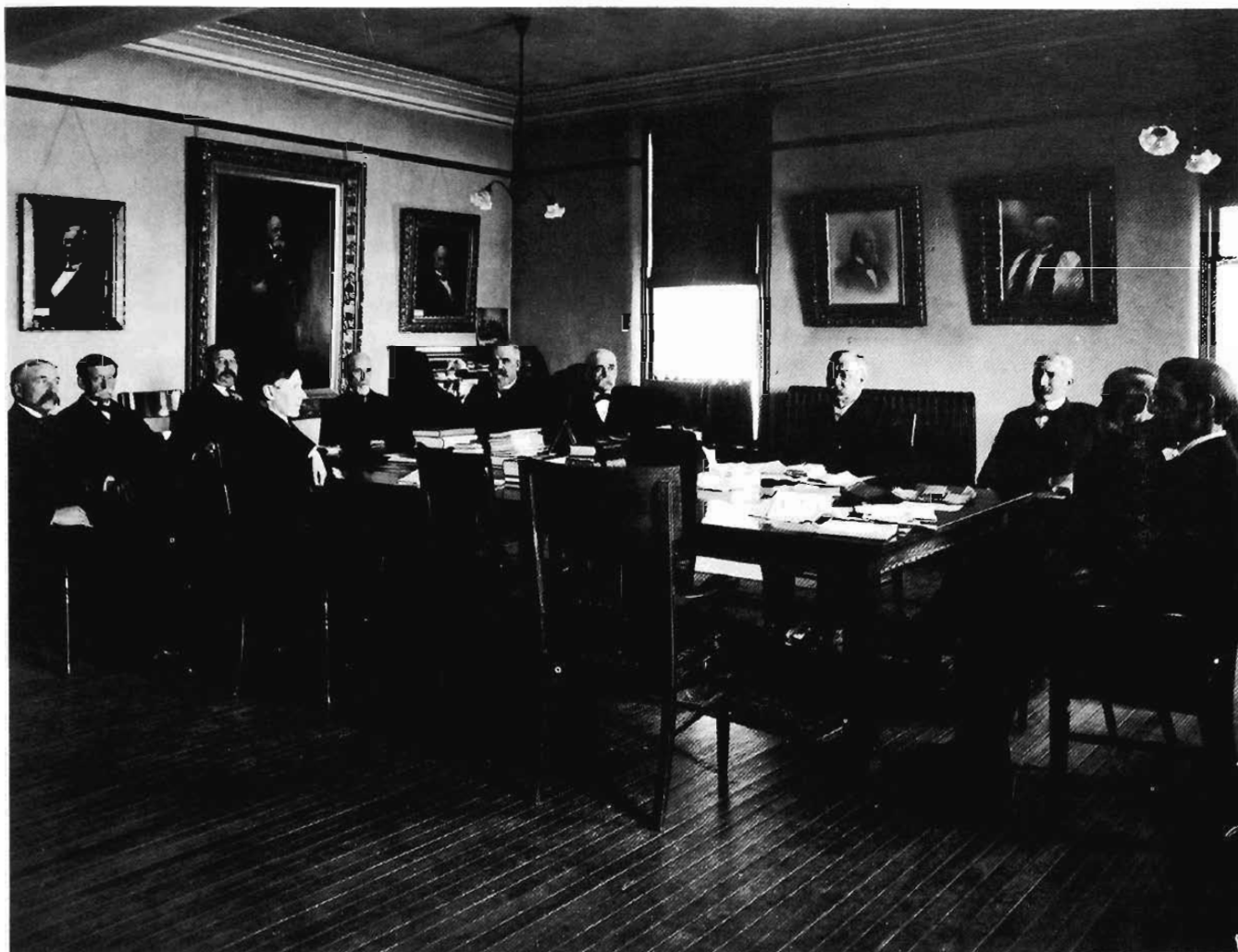
<sup>35</sup>J. A. Williamson, General Land Office, to W. P. Jewett, State Land Office, Feb. 3, 1881; D. P. Hall, Benson, district land office, to Jewett, Feb. 8, 1881; Mons Grinager, Worthington, district land office, to Jewett, Oct. 8, 1881; W. W. Braden to Jewett, July 2, 1885—all in Salt Spring Land Records.

<sup>36</sup>Three lists of salt springs lands transferred in 1885, in Approved Lists, vol. 6, no. 3, State Land Office; Auditor's Report, *Minnesota Executive Documents* (1877), 1:403; (1878), 1:299. In 1877–78 State Auditor Orlen P. Whitcomb had contended that the 1873 law should be amended to place the salt springs lands under direct control of his office. Whitcomb insisted this move would enable the state to establish a permanent fund, thereby limiting the expenditures for the Geological and Natural History Survey to the interest derived from the fund.

<sup>37</sup>Regents Minutes, Nov. 5, Dec. 21, 1877, Dec. 28, 1878; Appraisers' Return of Salt Spring Lands in Wilkin County, John S. Pillsbury, Governor's Records; Miscellaneous Record A, 459, Recorder's Office, Otter Tail County Courthouse, Fergus Falls. Throughout this article, amounts have been rounded to the nearest whole dollar.

<sup>38</sup>Certificate issued to Peterson by Board of Regents, in Regents Papers, University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>39</sup>Regents Executive Committee Minutes, Aug. 9, 1879, June 18, 1880; Stordock to John S. Pillsbury, Mar. 25, June 22, July 7, 24, 1881, John Sargent Pillsbury Papers, Supplement 1860–1892, University of Minnesota Archives; "Salt Spring Lands, 1892–1900," Reports of Land Sold, Land Department, Auditor's Records, State Archives.



*Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota, about 1895*

In the meantime the state and the regents secured additional consignments of indemnity lands because the 1885 acquisitions accounted for only two-thirds of the deficiency recognized by Congress in 1879. None of the involved parties—the General Land Office, the state auditor, or the regents—seemed concerned about transferring the remaining five thousand acres quickly. A court case in another state had deemed the 1879

statute's three-year limit for claiming land "directory only and not mandatory," and Minnesota's complex selection process requiring the regents to inspect and choose certain parcels slowed the process further.<sup>40</sup>

As good agricultural land became relatively scarce in western Minnesota, the regents looked northward, selecting public lands with mining and lumbering potential near Lake Vermilion in St. Louis County. As early as 1885 the university had chosen more than 1,096 northern acres, although the actual transfer from the General Land Office came in 1894, and four years later the regents obtained another 3,627 acres.<sup>41</sup>

Rather than emphasize sale of these lands, the regents adopted the new financial strategy of leasing timber and mineral rights. Under an agreement of January 3, 1900, for example, the university sold some timber rights to the Tower Logging Company for \$46,375, much more per acre than the selling price of

<sup>40</sup>Copy of endorsement by Edward A. Bowers, General Land Office, May 23, 1894, attached to Approved Lists, vol. 6, no. 4, State Land Office.

<sup>41</sup>Approved Lists, vol. 6, nos. 4 and 5, State Land Office; Indemnity Salt Spring Selections: List of lands selected . . . March 3rd, 1879, U. S. Land Office, Duluth, May 28, 1885; E. F. Best, General Land Office, to register and receiver, U. S. Land Office, Duluth, July 15, 1896; A. J. Taylor, U. S. Land Office, Duluth, to H. W. Childs, July 25, 1896—last three in Salt Spring Land Records.





*Portable surveyor's transit, used from 1853 to 1900 in Stearns County*

salt springs lands suitable for agriculture in the western part of the state.<sup>42</sup>

Aware that most of the salt springs lands had now been transferred, the regents again sought an accurate audit of their accounts, and in mid-1907, Nathaniel B. Hinckley, a St. Paul public accountant and auditor, reported on the results of his examination. Of the 46,080 acres granted to the state under the enabling act and the 1879 law, all but 1,149 had been received by the state, transferred to the university, and sold. The principal and interest from these sales amounted to \$246,442. From the sale of timber rights on the St. Louis County lands, the regents realized \$62,183 in principal and interest. Less than one-sixth of this revenue had been turned over to the survey; most had been remitted to the state treasurer, who released annual amounts to the survey to cover its actual expenditures.<sup>43</sup>

Hinckley's report clearly demonstrated that the disposition and administration of the salt springs lands had been done inexpensively. For the twenty-nine-year period dating from the first land sales in Fergus Falls, the regents had spent only \$3,837 on commissions, fees, and other expenses connected with sales and timber leases. The unsold lands in St. Louis County amounted to 4,621 acres, and, Hinckley concluded with emphasis, the federal government still owed Minnesota 1,149 acres of land.

The audit confirmed for the regents that the major responsibility connected with the salt springs lands was behind them. From their perspective in 1907, scant economic advantages remained, most of the unsold St. Louis County tracts being cutover lands.

Nonetheless, the regents set out to acquire the full complement of lands due them. At their bidding, State Auditor Samuel G. Iverson asked the General Land Office in April 1908 for a status report on the salt springs grants. In response S. V. Proudfit, the office's acting commissioner, informed him that Minnesota did not have any pending selections and that, because of time limits in the authorizing legislation, "it does not appear that the State of Minnesota is entitled to make further selections."<sup>44</sup>

Proudfit's ruling did not end the matter; it only delayed its resolution. Six years later George H. Hayes,

<sup>42</sup>Nathaniel B. Hinckley, Report to the Auditing Committee, Aug. 26, 1907, Board of Regents, Exhibit G, Office of the Comptroller, University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>43</sup>Here and two paragraphs below, Regents Minutes, Oct. 3, 1907; Hinckley Report; Samuel G. Iverson, "The Public Lands and School Fund of Minnesota," *MHS Collections* (1915), 15:301.

<sup>44</sup>Regents Minutes, May 7, 1908; Proudfit to Iverson, June 22, 1908, enclosed in Hayes to Preus, Feb. 17, 1915, Salt Spring Land Records.

the university comptroller, and Jacob A. O. Preus, state auditor, assembled materials based in large part on Hinckley's audit, to illustrate the status of the remaining salt springs grants. On this occasion the General Land Office responded cooperatively. The regents selected the remaining lands in 1914, and their formal transfer from the federal government occurred in 1916, fifty-nine years after the enabling act grant.<sup>45</sup>

REVIEWING their salt springs land policy once again on March 14, 1916, the regents formally reiterated their policy "not to dispose of the University holdings until such time as improvements and developments in the vicinity of the property shall have enhanced its value." Just over 5,700 acres of salt springs lands remained.<sup>46</sup>

The increasing appeal of lakeshores for private cabin sites during the 1920s reinforced the economic advantages of leasing rather than selling state-held lands. Rather than handle its own leases, however, the university made an informal agreement, probably in 1927, with the Minnesota Department of Conservation to manage the salt springs lands free of charge.<sup>47</sup>

In 1947 Harold Ostergaard, the conservation department's land officer, complained to university officials that the lack of a formal written contract made it difficult to administer these lands, particularly when the university might sell parcels without informing him. The university, the department, and its successor,

the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), however, continued to operate under their informal arrangement for another thirty-five years. Finally, in 1961, they formally agreed the department would be permitted to use "for state park purposes" 1,120 acres of salt springs lands to be included within Bear Head Lake State Park in northern St. Louis County.<sup>48</sup>

During the 1970s increasing private interest in leasing or purchasing university lands, including salt springs lands, revived the question, and in 1975 the DNR's land supervisor informed the university's real estate coordinator that he was willing to continue managing university lands, but under formal agreement. University officials finally acted in 1981 when the DNR informed them that it could no longer manage the salt springs lands without reimbursement. This notification caused the university to consider managing the salt springs lands as a prelude to selling them, but when a DNR representative pointed out difficulties the university could encounter, the regents ordered negotiation of a formal management contract with the DNR in November 1981.<sup>49</sup>

The ensuing Management of State Salt Lands Agreement, dated September 2, 1982, stipulated that the DNR be paid an annual fee "equal to one-third of the gross income generated by said management excepting income from granting of permanent easements and sale of land." Management duties included leasing cabin sites; selling resources such as timber and gravel; granting temporary easements, permits, and licenses; collecting rents; and subdividing any land if it would generate a greater financial return. The agreement also continued the DNR's control of the salt springs lands in Bear Head Lake park in exchange for the university's use of state lands within Itasca State Park for a forestry and biological station. Reluctant to commit to a long-term contract, the parties agreed to review it every five years. Significantly, the agreement reserved to the university its traditional right to sell any of the salt springs lands, which still consisted of 5,144 acres in St. Louis County and 607 acres in Cook County.<sup>50</sup>

Since the agreement went into effect in 1983, the DNR's main activity has been the leasing of salt springs lands for cabin sites. In 1987, for example, it managed twenty-nine cabin-site leases, one commercial lease, and one right-of-way easement, for which it was paid \$25,327, one-third to be retained by the DNR. Meanwhile, a recheck of the salt springs lands inventory reduced the total acreage slightly from 5,751 to 5,671.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, the university, in keeping with the national and state trend toward privatization, again pursued a long-range goal of selling the lands. Finding restrictive the 1873 act requiring that funds derived from the sales support only the Geological and Natural History Survey, university officials successfully

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<sup>45</sup>Hayes to Preus, Feb. 17, 1915, Salt Spring Land Records; Approved Lists, vol. 6: nos. 6 and 7, State Land Office.

<sup>46</sup>Regents Minutes, Mar. 14, 1916; David L. Sipila, Real Estate Office, University of Minnesota, to author, Aug. 10, 1990, in author's possession; Land Records, vol. 9, Index of Abstracts of Title, University Attorney's Records, University of Minnesota Archives.

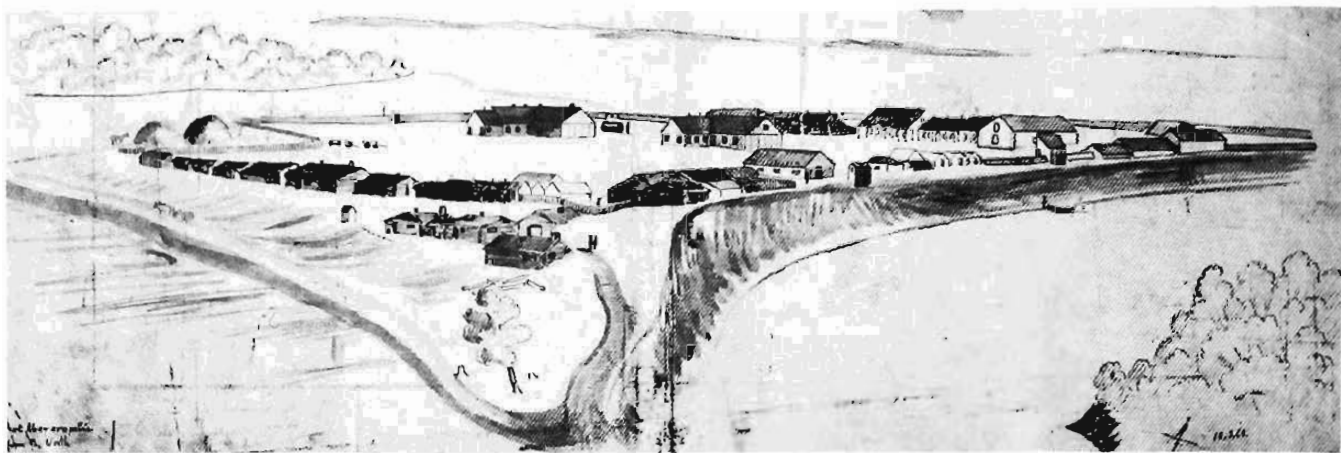
<sup>47</sup>Regents Minutes, June 13, 1927; Vernon L. Ausen, Property Acquisitions, University of Minnesota, to R. Joel Tierney, Mar. 19, 1976, Office of Real Estate Coordinator, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

<sup>48</sup>Ostergaard to Laurence R. Lunden, comptroller, Oct. 15, Dec. 11, 1947; Thomas L. O'Hearn, real estate manager, to Ostergaard, Dec. 22, 1947; Ostergaard to O'Hearn, Dec. 23, 1947—all in Bureau of Real Estate Management, Department of Natural Resources, St. Paul; O'Hearn to Lunden, Nov. 6, 1947, Office of Real Estate Coordinator; Regents Minutes, April 14, 1961.

<sup>49</sup>Ausen to Tierney, Mar. 19, 1976; Regents Minutes, Nov. 12, 1981.

<sup>50</sup>See "Management of State Salt Lands Agreement," Sept. 2, 1982, and Ausen's sworn statement, Nov. 9, 1982, both in Office of Real Estate Coordinator.

<sup>51</sup>Vicky Matson, Office of Real Estate Coordinator, to author, Jan. 17, 1989, in author's possession; Ron Sando, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Natural Resources, interview with author, St. Paul, Mar. 12, 1990; "University of Minnesota Real Estate Inventory: Salt Spring Lands," [1987], Office of Real Estate Coordinator; Sipila to Lass, Jan. 10, 1992.



*Fort Abercrombie, drawn by Robert O. Sweeney in 1862, shortly after Skinner's visit*

asked the legislature in 1988 to permit expenditure of income from the land fund on university branch campuses at Crookston, Duluth, Morris, and Waseca.<sup>52</sup>

Having achieved this flexibility, the university next had the DNR-managed leased sites, averaging about three acres in size, appraised with the intent of sale. Before selling any of the lakeshore lots, the university offered leaseholders the first right to buy, resulting in the sale of all twenty-nine lots between March 1990 and January 1991. A dozen additional unleased lots went to public bidders. These sales decreased the university's total salt springs lands holdings by about 142 acres to the present total of 5,629 acres.<sup>53</sup>

The photograph on p.9 is by the author; on p. 11, 19, and 22, from the MHS Museum Collections; on p. 13 (top), 15, 16, 17 (top left), from the Minnesota State Archives, MHS; on p. 20, from the Office of the Real Estate Coordinator, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. All others are from the MHS. Alan Ominsky made the map on p. 12.

To dispense with some of these lands, the university has proposed selling its Bear Head Lake holdings to the DNR, but questions about university use of 79 acres in Itasca State Park also need to be resolved. The university hopes to sell the remaining lands to the United States Forest Service, which may request funds to purchase the lands within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and several other parcels in the next few years.

The university's goal is to liquidate its salt springs lands holdings. Until then, the university will remain owner of the salt springs lands. Dating from Minnesota's enabling act of 1857, they provide a link with the state's founding. Today, if nothing else, they should serve as a reminder of the frontier era when Minnesotans optimistically assumed that the lands would be used to develop the state's salt industry.

<sup>52</sup>Minnesota, *Session Laws*, 1988, 1574; Sipila to Lass, Jan. 10, 1992. Branch campus expenditures had to be matched by permanent university fund monies.

<sup>53</sup>Here and below, see Sando interview, Mar. 12, 1990; Sipila to Lass, Jan. 10, 1992.



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