

AS WE PLAN TO OBSERVE 150 YEARS of development and change with events throughout the state, it is instructive to consider for a moment where it all began. Art helps us do that by providing glimpses into life in Minnesota on the eve of statehood.

Between 1856 and 1860, artist Edwin Whitefield (1816–92) traversed the region, sketching and painting watercolors of a land largely untouched by European settlement. Born and trained in England, Whitefield said of Minnesota: “I never saw any country that pleased me half so much.”

Not only an artist, Whitefield was also a businessman. He was involved in land sales and townsite development in Minnesota, and his drawings and watercolors were reproduced in brochures promoting settlement. He lectured extensively in the East on the opportunities the new state provided and in 1859 published a series of lithographs titled “The Lakes of Minnesota.” The Minnesota Historical Society has more than 100 works by this prolific artist.

With Whitefield’s help, the secret was out—and the rest, as they say, is history.

—Brian Szott, curator of art



*Edwin Whitefield's watercolors, Bay City and Hunting Scene at a Minnesota Lake, both painted between 1856 and 1859*

