

## St. Cloud in the territorial period /

W. B. Mitchell

### ST. CLOUD IN THE TERRITORIAL PERIOD.\*

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BY WILLIAM B. MITCHELL.

It was the first or second day of May, 1857, when the Cremona, a stern-wheel steamer direct from Pittsburg, Pa., with a number of other steamboats which had cut their way through the thin ice at the edge of Lake Pepin, landed at St. Paul. There was little in the place, which then numbered scarcely more than 7,000 or 8,000 souls, to impress the newcomer. The thing which most directly attracted my youthful attention was the seemingly unprotected condition of the store windows, through which the goods and wares of the dealers could be seen at all hours of the night, offering apparently a safe and easy opportunity for burglars to help themselves,—in striking contrast to the heavily shuttered and strongly barred store windows of Pittsburg, which had just been left.

After discharging such part of its cargo as belonged to St. Paul, the Cremona started for St. Anthony, whose people were exceedingly ambitious to have their embryo city known as “the head of navigation on the upper Mississippi.” It was a tedious and expensive undertaking, although finally successful. More than twenty-four hours time was consumed in making the ten miles, during which not only were many barrels of rosin, besides the usual fuel, thrown under the boilers to force a head of steam, but the capstan was brought into frequent requisition to drag the boat over the worst rapids. The success of this effort and a few others of a similar character failed, however, to overcome the obstacles thrown in the way by nature and to make the city at the Falls the head of navigation, which still lingers some ten miles further down stream. After our household goods and other

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belongings, 640 including a stock of merchandise, had been carted around St. Anthony Falls, they were put aboard the North Star, one of a fleet of three small steamboats which made regular trips to St. Cloud. This destination was reached May 6th, after a continuous journey by river occupying more than five weeks.

The first building to be seen, as the little steamer rounded Stony Point, was the Stearns House, a very creditable three-story hotel located on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi and which had been built the year before. After serving for a number of years its mission as a hotel, the building was purchased in 1869 by the people of St. Cloud and was presented to the state of Minnesota as the first home of the St. Cloud Normal School. Later it was used as a dormitory in connection with the school, and after the erection of the new dormitory (Lawrence Hall) was sold to private parties and removed from the grounds. A little south of it, in 1857, was a small log building in which was printed St. Cloud's first newspaper, the Minnesota Advertiser, owned by the Town-site Company which platted the so-called Lower Town. The first number of the paper was issued in 1856. The bed of an old-fashioned hand press held the "forms," which were inked with buckskin balls, the result being a very creditable looking paper.

Another building of interest was the Everett schoolhouse, a small frame structure located a short distance west of the Stearns House. It contained but a single room, and had been built by private enterprise, and the school was taught by private individuals. It was named for Edward Everett, who recognized the compliment by sending to the school a choice, though not large, selection of standard books, which for many years constituted the public library of the place.

The first town-site location at St. Cloud, covering what came to be known as "Middle Town," now the business center of the city, was made in 1854 by John L. Wilson, who at this writing is still a resident of the city and enjoying good health at the advanced age of eighty-four years. The name was chosen by Mr. Wilson, who has no French blood in his veins, because his fancy had been struck by the name of the city in France which

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had been the scene of some of Napoleon's famous exploits. The 641 same year General Sylvanus B. Lowry platted what was first known as Arcadia, afterward "Upper Town," and later Lowry's Addition. Within a few months afterward George F. Brott and Orrin Curtis, of St. Anthony Falls, surveyed and platted St. Cloud City, better known for many years as "Lower Town." These three surveys constituted about all of what until boom times was the city of St. Cloud, but which now, with its various additions, covers parts of three counties.

George F. Brott was a most interesting character, and in those early days was almost omnipresent. He was a born speculator and an ideal promoter, and his town-sites were scattered in all directions over the northern part of the state along the lines of proposed paper railroads. He was of medium size, with short, curly hair, small, restless eyes, a sanguine disposition, winning ways, and a volubility which has seldom been equalled. During the civil war he went to New Orleans, where in various speculations he made and lost several fortunes. Later he removed to Washington city, where he died a few years since.

General Sylvanus B. Lowry, by whom the northern part of the city was platted, was a typical Southerner,—swarthy, dignified, courteous, although at times somewhat taciturn. He was strongly imbued with the southern view regarding the divine right of slavery, and was recognized leader of the Democratic party during those early days. When first coming to Minnesota he located at Long Prairie, where he spent two years; then going to Watab, he traded there with the Indians until his removal to St. Cloud in 1855. He had a mail contract, which, with real estate business, occupied his attention, and he made this city his home until his death in 1865.

Rev. David Lowry, father of General Lowry, was one of the foremost pioneers of northern Minnesota and one of the strongest intellectually. Leaving Tennessee in 1849 he came to Long Prairie, in the present county of Todd, where he remained for two years teaching an Indian school. He was a man of large frame and great physical strength, and perfectly fearless. It is said that on several occasions when the Indians, after having had too much

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liquor, became troublesome, he would dash in among them with a club and laying right and left would quickly bring them to good 642 behavior. In 1851 he returned to Tennessee where he remained until the spring of 1856, when he came to St. Cloud, locating in the part of the city then called Arcadia. He at once organized a church of the denomination to which he belonged, the Cumberland Presbyterian, which was within a few months of being the first Protestant church organized in St. Cloud. Of the ten original members of this church, three, Mrs. Margaret A. Biggerstaff, Mrs. Ellen W. Lamb and Mrs. Mary E. Ketcham, are still residents of this city. Mr. Lowry was an unusually strong and able speaker, a man of fine education, and the author of several books. Although southern born he was of antislavery spirit, and bringing to the North the slaves which he had inherited he freed them, and during the civil war was a strong Union man. In 1864 he removed to Iowa and later to Missouri, where he died in 1876.

Mr. Lowry's son-in-law, Rev. Thomas P. Calhoun, followed later, coming to St. Cloud in 1857. He brought overland from Tennessee a herd of pure-bred Durham cattle, these being probably the first blooded cattle ever brought into Minnesota, although upon this point I would not venture to speak positively. His intention was to go into stockraising on a somewhat extensive scale, but in 1859, while crossing a narrow wooden bridge over the deep ravine where now is Fifth avenue south, his horse sprang to one side and breaking through the frail railing fell to the hard ground below, dragging the sleigh with it. Mr. Calhoun received injuries from which he died soon afterward, while his wife, who was by his side, was comparatively uninjured. His father was a cousin of John C. Calhoun, the great nullifier, but had no sympathy whatever with his political views, and after the rupture between Jackson and Calhoun he forbade the latter's name to be ever mentioned on his plantation. David T. Calhoun, the judge of probate of Stearns county, is a son of the Rev. Thomas P. Calhoun.

Charles T. Stearns, for whom the county was named, was a member of the Territorial legislature from St. Anthony Falls. When the bill naming the county was originally passed, in February, 1855, the name was Stevens, after Governor Isaac I. Stevens, of Washington

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Territory, who had been so prominently identified with early Pacific Railroad surveys in the Northwest, but in the 643 process of enrollment it was changed to Stearns. As another county in Minnesota was afterward named for Governor Stevens, both of these pioneers have been appropriately recognized. Mr. Stearns came from St. Anthony to St. Cloud in the spring of 1856, through the efforts of his son-in-law, George F. Brott, and built the Stearns House. He lived here until 1864, when he removed to Mobile, Ala., where he was for some years register of the United States Land Office; then he went to New Orleans, which city he made his home until May 22, 1898, when he died after having passed his ninetieth birthday. He was a man of large frame and big heart, true to his friends, genial, taking life philosophically, and enjoying nothing as well as telling a good story.

Mrs. Jane Gray Swisshelm came in the spring of 1857 from Pittsburg, Pa., where she had long been connected with the press and become widely known as an antislavery writer, and purchased the Advertiser, changing its name to the Visitor, which had been the name of her Pittsburg paper. Her pronounced antislavery views at that time, when under the provisions of the fugitive slave law slaves were brought into Minnesota by summer visitors from the South, aroused bitter local opposition, and on the night of March 24, 1858, her printing office was broken into and indispensable parts of the press, with the greater part of the type, were taken and thrown into the Mississippi river. An indignation meeting of citizens, to some extent regardless of party, was promptly held and steps were taken to purchase a new outfit with which Mrs. Swisshelm resumed the publication of her paper. She made several lecturing trips through the state, pleading for better legal rights and larger opportunities for women; and what she then asked for, with much more, has since been obtained by the women not only of Minnesota but of the country at large. Soon after the outbreak of the civil war she went to Washington city and entered the government hospitals there as a nurse of sick and wounded soldiers, at the same time using her pen vigorously and fearlessly to denounce some of the abuses which she found in those hospitals as the result of the redtapeism. Contrary to the impressions of many who never saw her but who judged of her personal appearance and manner from the vigor and

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aggressiveness of her political writings, Mrs. Swisshelm was not an Amazon, but 644 a slight, frail, delicate woman, with a soft, low voice and the tenderest sensibilities. Her death occurred July 21, 1884, at her old home near Pittsburg.

In the closing days of the Territorial era Stephen Miller came to St. Cloud from Harrisburg, Pa., where he had been quite prominent in public and political affairs. He engaged in mercantile business, as the senior member of the firm of Miller and Swisshelm, in which he continued for several years. He was an ardent Republican, and his natural temperament soon led him to take an active part in politics. A ready speaker, making his points clearly and effectively, with a good voice, quick wit and a large stock of stories and anecdotes, he was a successful campaigner, and his services were in much demand. He was a delegate to the Republican national convention which nominated Abraham Lincoln, and was given other party recognition. At the beginning of the civil war he enlisted as a private in the First Minnesota regiment, but was commissioned by Governor Ramsey its lieutenant colonel. For bravery and honorable service, he was afterward commissioned colonel of the Seventh Minnesota Volunteers, and later won a brigadier generalship. In the year 1863, having been nominated by the Republican party as its candidate for the fourth governor of Minnesota, he resigned his commission and returned home, and being elected filled the executive chair for the next two years. After the close of his term he engaged in business, and served in the state legislature one or more terms. His genial and companionable manners made him very popular, both at home and in the army. He was a warm personal friend of Governor Alexander Ramsey, and during his residence in St. Cloud the latter, who had property interests in this vicinity, was a frequent visitor here. These two, with my father, Henry Z. Mitchell, who like the others had been in his younger days a resident of Harrisburg, spent many an evening together talking over, in "Pennsylvania Dutch," early times, as well as discussing more recent events. The three were born within a few months of each other and all have gone to their final rest.

Another territorial settler who was prominent in public life was Judge Edward O. Hamlin. He first located at the neighboring village of Sauk Rapids, the county seat of Benton

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county, one 645 of the three original organized counties when the territory was first divided. Judge Hamlin presided at the first term of court held in Stearns county after the organization of the state, in 1858, and afterward removed to St. Cloud, where he practiced law successfully for a number of years. He was the first mayor of this city and in succeeding years was the Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor and for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. As a member of the committee on platform at the Democratic national convention in 1864, he opposed the adoption of the plank which declared the war to be a failure, and throughout the struggle he was known as a war Democrat. Although considerably under the average stature and of slight build, Judge Hamlin had a quiet dignity which always commanded respect, while his thorough sincerity and high character won for him general esteem. He left St. Cloud in 1873, returning to his old home at Honesdale, Pa., where he remained until his death which occurred February 4, 1895.

Charles A. Gilman is another pioneer whose first home in the territory was at Sauk Rapids, but who afterwards removed to St. Cloud. Coming from New Hampshire to Sauk Rapids in 1855, he engaged in farming and lumbering, remaining there until 1861, when, crossing the river, he made St. Cloud his home. He became active in politics and was one of the leading Republicans of the state. He has held a number of elective and appointive offices, having been a member of the senate and house of representatives, lieutenant governor for four years, and register of the United States Land Office. During recent years he has been engaged in real estate business in St. Cloud.

Joseph Edelbrock was appointed, September 15, 1855, postmaster at Arcadia, on the request of General Lowry, who was the proprietor of that part of the coming city, and whose wishes regarding the disposition of the offices in this part of the territory had prompt consideration at Washington. Franklin Sisson had previously been appointed postmaster at St. Cloud, but soon after this, upon the request of General Lowry, the Arcadia postoffice was merged in that of St. Cloud, and May 2, 1856, Mr. Edelbrock was appointed postmaster at St. Cloud. The mail up to this time had been delivered at Sauk

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Rapids, where it could be 646 had whenever the postmaster here felt like making the three miles trip across the river to get it, which Mr. Edelbrock says he did "whenever it came handy." But from the date of the consolidation the mail was left at East St. Cloud, where, almost directly opposite the present state normal school buildings, was a log blockhouse, which had been built probably by Martin Wooley. The next year, 1857, frame additions were built to this by John Emerson, and for a number of years afterward it was a stopping place for teams going to the pineries on the upper Mississippi. One of the three "swing" ferries which conveyed teams and passengers across the river at lower, middle and upper town, was located here, and it was at this place that the stage line which carried the mails and passengers from St. Paul crossed until a bridge was built at St. Germain street. To return to Mr. Edelbrock: he was the first sheriff of Stearns county, serving at the term held June 25, 1855, when Judge Moses Sherburne presided. He has been register of deeds and county commissioner, and in 1886 was appointed by Grover Cleveland postmaster when the conditions were very different from those when he was first postmaster at St. Cloud. He is now living in this city, having retired from the mercantile business in which he was engaged for a number of years.

J. E. West, who came in 1855, has been one of the city's most progressive citizens, as merchant, hotel builder, promoter and superintendent of the construction of the dam across the Mississippi river, and real estate dealer. He was captain of a company in the Seventh Minnesota volunteers, and for twenty-one years consecutively was postmaster at St. Cloud. He is now secretary of the St. Cloud Building Association.

Nehemiah P. Clarke, who arrived here in 1855, has been merchant, banker, government contractor, and lumberman. For a number of years past he has been engaged in importing and breeding fine stock, especially Clydesdale horses and shorthorn cattle.

Henry C. Waite was St. Cloud's first lawyer, opening an office here in 1855. He tried the first murder case which came before a court in Stearns county, and succeeded in having his client acquitted on the ground of self-defense, a result which was admitted to be largely

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due to the skill with which the young attorney 647 conducted the case. Mr. Waite was a member of the constitutional convention, and has served in the state legislature for several terms, besides holding the office of register of the United States Land Office at this place.

Among the other Territorial residents of St. Cloud are Thomas C. Alden, who in 1856 opened the first loan and banking office in the place, his wife (then Miss Talcott) being the teacher of the first school; John H. Raymond and F. H. Dam, manufacturers; W. T. Clarke, builder; John Schwartz, saddler; Lewis Clark, machinist; Levi L. Ball, Thomas Jones, M. P. Noel, and William Holes. The list is not a long one and is steadily growing less.

The first Protestant church society organized was the Baptist, which was organized in the winter of 1855-6 by Deacon Cram, one of the pioneers whose influence for good in those early days was strongly felt. The meetings were held in a small frame building in lower town, near the river front, which has long since disappeared. Of the ten original members, but two, J. E. West and Mrs. Mary J. Spicer, remain.

In the spring of 1858 a party of Ojibway Indians came from their reservation on the upper Mississippi on their way to attack the Sioux on the Minnesota river. They camped in front of the Stearns House, on what is now a part of the campus of the State Normal School, and danced their war dance, to the monotonous pounding of their drums. Among these almost naked warriors were some as fine specimens of physical manhood as I ever saw. They returned soon afterwards with a bunch of Sioux scalps, but made their homeward journey on the east side of the river so that we did not see them again. It was only on rare occasions that an Indian was seen in the place, the half-breeds being more frequent visitors.

An important event in those days was the coming each spring of the long trains of Red River carts, loaded with the Hudson Bay Company's furs. These carts were constructed without iron, the wheels being without tires, and the other parts being held together by wooden pegs and thongs of hide. As they made the trips in good condition the work,

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however rudely done, must have been well done. They were drawn by a single ox provided with something approaching a regular harness, and the dreary creakings 648 which sounded the approach of the long procession told that axle grease was an article wholly unknown in those far northern regions. The drivers were half-breeds, and the journey, coming and going, occupied many weeks. At first these trains went on through to St. Paul; later, when the present Great Northern railway had reached St. Cloud, which was its terminus for a time, the carts unloaded here; but with the construction of the railroad further westward their visits ceased altogether. Those were the days when buffalo robes of the best quality, which are now a very expensive rarity, could be had for a few dollars.

The second bridge to span the upper Mississippi river was that built in 1856 at Watab, about eight miles north of St. Cloud. It was built for Stephen Emerson and John L. Young, the proprietors of a town-site on the west side of the river, intended to be a rival to Watab. The bridge was all completed with the exception of the timbers being bolted to the piers, when one night a strong wind lifted the superstructure off its supports and dropped in into the river. So quietly was it all done, however, that the man in the toll-house was not aware of what had happened until the next morning. The superstructure was never replaced, and the piers stood in the river for many years, until finally torn and worn away by the impact of the logs and ice. The hopes and prospects of these enterprising speculators disappeared with their bridge, and the town-site on which they had ventured so much is only a thing of paper and the past. One of the builders of this bridge was Lewis Clark, then a resident of Watab, but soon afterward coming to this city, which is still his home.

It is only as one recalls those early days, when Dubuque was the nearest railroad point, when the country to the west and northwest was almost without a settler, when pork and beans were the staff of life and dried-apple pie a luxury, when the mercury was at home at 30 to 50 degrees below zero during most of the winter months, when one hundred days of sleighing was the minimum,—it is only when things such as these are brought to mind

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that one can at all appreciate the tremendous changes which have taken place since the territorial days and the prosperous conditions which exist in Minnesota today.