

IV. THE ROADS OF THE TERRITORIAL PIONEERS

Resourcefulness and initiative have been the main reliance of the people on the fringes of civilization throughout American history. A far-off federal government might make efforts to protect these strays from the fold from the depredations of Indians, and it might appropriate funds from the federal treasury to help them to build their statehouses, their roads, and indeed, to pay the expenses of their government. But in the end, the determining factor in the erection of an American commonwealth on the outskirts of the United States has been their ability to adapt to their needs the implements which they found at hand. It was so in Minnesota. While the frontier territory was not averse to accepting all that it could get from the federal government, and while it kept asking for more federal assistance for its government, its buildings, and its roads, yet the frontiersmen realized that all that the federal government might do was but a small fraction of what had to be done.

The physical part of the road system of territorial Minnesota had little from the past upon which to draw. A few straggling wagon trails in the St. Croix Valley, the warpaths of the barbaric Indians, the cart

tracks of the fur traders, and game trails over prairies and through forests -- these constituted the physical heritage of the pioneers. They had to start from the beginning to mark out roads on the prairies, to chop out trails through the forests, to build up causeways over the miry soil of the swamps. Their road system was an ever changing one. It grew as the territory grew, expanded as the needs of an ever increasing population increased. When the end of the territorial period approached, the road system was still far from being completely outlined, for much of Minnesota had yet to be conquered by the white pioneer. Always the story was the same. On the frontier the pioneers cut out rough trails; their brethren in slightly more settled communities improved these trails; and the inhabitants of the still older areas re-routed the roads along section lines, cut down unseemly grades, and built better bridges than the makeshifts which the pioneers had thrown across streams.

Throughout the territorial period, the legislature acted as guide and co-ordinator for the pioneers. The frontier settlements were generally isolated islands in the midst of a wilderness, and one of the chief causes for discontent in such communities was their loneliness. If they were located on navigable rivers, their isolation was rendered less acute during the summer months by the more or less regular calls of

the steamboats which plied the upper Mississippi River and its tributary streams. During the winter months and periods of extreme drouth, however, they were entirely cut off from intercourse with one another and with the outside world. It is not surprising, therefore, that they clamored for a means of communication that would be satisfactory at all seasons of the year. The editor of one territorial newspaper pleaded, "Roads are the veins and arteries of a state -- as essential to its existence as are the same organs to the animal system. They are the avenues thro' which must flow the enterprise and activity of its citizens, the life blood of its physical system." ¹

It was the duty of the territorial government to see that these channels carried the trade and commerce of the scattered frontier communities in an unobstructed flow. The isolated settlements all too often were incapable of seeing that their well-being was bound up with that of rival towns, and it was the duty of the territorial government to make sure that, in the opening of roads which extended through more than one county, the best interests of all the communities involved were served. Thus, the territorial government could order, upon petition, the opening of a route through two or more counties and could insure its continuity.

1. St. Anthony Express, December 17, 1853.

This power, however, was conditioned by the proviso that the petition for a road had to be signed by twelve householders in each county through which it was to pass, and that they had to live in the vicinity of the proposed road. The function of the territorial government was an important one, for it served to co-ordinate the actions of the counties and, when the general good of the people demanded it, to supplement them.

The population of Minnesota grew slowly during the first few years. The census of 1850 listed 6,077 inhabitants; in 1854 it was estimated that there were about 32,000 persons residing in the territory. The increase, however, consisted mostly of accretions to the population of the main centers, such as St. Paul, St. Anthony, and Stillwater. But during those years the foundations were being laid for a great increase in population that was to take place in the last years of the territorial period. In 1851 treaties were negotiated at Traverse des Sioux and Mendota which resulted in the cession by the Indians of their claims to a vast area of Minnesota west of the Mississippi River. The treaties were ratified in the summer of 1852, and early in 1853 steps were taken to survey the land for disposal to settlers. The ratification of the treaties and the glowing descriptions of the region that were published in Minnesota newspapers centered a flood light of publicity upon the Minnesota scene. The most spectacular

manifestation of the results of this publicity was the famous railroad excursion of 1854, which celebrated the opening of a rail link to the banks of the Mississippi River. The journey included an inspection of the railroad and a boat trip up the Mississippi River to St. Paul. Many important political and literary figures made the pilgrimage to the frontier, and their reports heightened a growing interest in Minnesota and the Northwest among the people in the older states. Although the early years of the fifties were relatively quiet, they were spent in making ready for the influx of settlers which all Minnesota enthusiasts were sure would come when the possibilities of the new frontier were known. Squatters encroached on the unsurveyed lands in the country which so recently had been Indian lands, and townsite boomers laid out towns and got ready to advertise the sale of lots. Those who reached the ground first sought to entrench themselves so as to profit from the boom when it came. ²

The quiet growth of Minnesota during the early fifties was also characteristic of the development of the road system. The roads which the federal government had begun to build, while primarily intended for military purposes, were of great utility to the settlers. Locally, the counties widened the areas reached

2. Folwell, Minnesota, 1: 275-288, 352, 358, 360.

by their roads, and in the absence of a great need for a comprehensive system of roads, there was little activity on the part of the territorial government. The legislature of 1849 authorized the opening of five territorial roads, all of which were within the limits of the settled area. One of them extended from Stillwater, by way of White Bear Lake, to the mouth of the Rum River. Two roads from Point Douglas to St. Paul were ordered opened: one of them by way of Cottage Grove, and the other by way of Red Rock and Pig's Eye. A fourth road followed the east bank of the Mississippi River from the mouth of the Rum River to Crow Wing, and the fifth one connected St. Paul and the settlement of Little Canada. A charter permitting Franklin Steele to operate a ferry across the Mississippi at St. Anthony Falls was also granted.³ The legislature in 1851 was constrained by St. Anthony interests to open a road from St. Anthony to Willow River, Wisconsin. The road was to cross the St. Paul-Stillwater road where John Morgan had erected his Halfway House, and was to gain access to Willow River by means of the ferry across St. Croix Lake which the Wisconsin legislature in 1848 had authorized William H. Nobles to establish.⁴

3. Laws, 1849, p. 96, 97, 98, 105. The Minnesota Chronicle and Register of St. Paul for December 22, 1849, noted that the roads had been laid out.

4. Laws, 1851, p. 27. Morgan's tavern was located about half way between St. Paul and Stillwater. The Revised Statutes of 1851 (p. 578) specifically exempted

The legislature of 1851 authorized the establishment of two new ferries, and altered the charter granted to Franklin Steele in 1849. John Banfill, who had petitioned vainly to the session of 1849 for a charter, was granted the right to maintain a ferry across the Mississippi River at the mouth of Rice Creek, a short distance above St. Anthony, near what later came to be known as Fridley, in Anoka County. A license was also granted to William A. Cheever for a ferry across the Mississippi River just below the Falls of St. Anthony, near the present site of the University of Minnesota. ⁵

By the time the next session of the legislature met, the picture was changing, for the Indian treaties had been negotiated, and already several hundreds of land-hungry settlers had invaded the "Suland" without waiting for the land to be opened to settlement. They clamored for the ratification of the treaties, and they worked feverishly for the opening of roads. As a consequence, the legislature of 1852 authorized three of these squatters, living on the banks of the Mississippi River, to lay out a road from Read's Landing by way of "the high lands between the tributaries of the Waziojie river and those of the Mississippi and Cannon rivers,

from repeal the act of the Wisconsin legislature granting to Nobles the right to establish a ferry across Lake St. Croix at Willow River. The town of Willow River is today known as Hudson.

5. Laws, 1851, p. 29, 31, 37. Steele's new charter was of ten years' duration.

by Okaman Lake, to such point on the Minnesota river as may . . . be considered the most practicable." It is a tribute to the legislators' regard for the law that they added a proviso that the law should not take effect "unless the late Sioux treaty be ratified by Congress at its present session." 6

More active was the interest shown during this session in the establishment of ferries. The legislature passed thirteen bills granting new charters for ferries and one modifying the terms of a charter previously granted. Eleven of these were for ferries across the Mississippi River, and the remaining three, across the St. Croix. The majority of the charters granted were for ferries along the upper portion of the Mississippi River, where settlements had already started. Three of them, however, were intended to provide a means of getting directly to the new trans-Mississippi country from Wisconsin. One of these was for a ferry across the river at what became the village of La Crescent, opposite La Crosse, Wisconsin; the second provided an indirect entrance at Oliver's Grove, or Hastings; and the third was designed to provide a connecting link at the foot of Lake Pepin with the new territorial road from Read's Landing to the Minnesota River. All four-

6. Laws, 1852, p. 57. The "Waziojie river" is the Zumbro River of today, and "Okaman Lake" is Lake Elysian in Waseca and Le Sueur counties. Upham, Geographic Names, 301, 559.

teen ferries were designed to perform an important function in providing access to the land and developing the trade and commerce of the frontier country. ⁷

But the pioneers of the early fifties looked farther into the future. They planned a bridge across the Mississippi, and the legislature of 1852 incorporated the Mississippi Bridge Company and authorized it to build a toll bridge near the Falls of St. Anthony, between Nicollet Island, above the falls, and Spirit Island, below the falls. The capital stock of the company was set at \$25,000, divided into 250 shares

7. Laws, 1852, p. 1, 5, 27, 28, 31, 39, 41-44, 50, 53-56, 59. The three ferries chartered on the St. Croix were at Taylor's Falls, Stillwater, and Willow River, Wisconsin. Two charters were granted for ferries at St. Paul -- at the Upper Landing and the Lower Landing -- both of which had been operating under charters granted by the commissioners of Ramsey County in 1849. See post, p. 221, 238. Two charters were granted for ferries in St. Anthony. On the upper Mississippi River a ferry was authorized at the mouth of Swan River, where the military road to Long Prairie crossed the river; other ferries were chartered at Crow Wing, Sauk Rapids, and the mouth of the Crow River. After a charter had been granted to Anson Northup, Pierre Bottineau, Louis Roberts, and Peter Poncin for a ferry a mile and a half above the "upper rapids, at the Falls of St. Anthony," it was discovered that the location was not the one desired by the petitioners. A new bill failed to reach a vote before the session adjourned. Charters for a number of ferries were lost, including one to Antoine Roberts for a ferry across the Rum River and one to Captain William B. Dodd for one across the Minnesota River. It is interesting, in connection with bills lost, to note that one for a territorial road from St. Paul to a point opposite Fort Snelling was refused. Presumably this was because the proposed road would lie entirely within the limits of Ramsey County, and hence was a county undertaking. Minnesota Pioneer, March 11, 1852.

of \$100 each, and the term of the charter was twenty years. If the bridge was not commenced within two years and completed within five years, the charter was to be forfeited, and the legislature, after fifteen years, could assess a valuation, which the company was to be compelled to accept, in case the county or counties in which the bridge was built wished to purchase it.

This bill was not passed on the spur of the moment. It was the result of persistent agitation and planning, begun when the territory was first organized and kept alive by the constant dinning of men like James M. Goodhue. Goodhue dreamed of such a bridge across the river at St. Paul, and he visioned the great commercial and military advantages which it would bring to the new territory. It would focus there all the converging roads and railroads of the nation, he predicted, and make St. Paul the gateway between the two great oceans. But Goodhue wanted a "National bridge, to be free in all coming time, for all but the enemies of our beloved country." Sooner or later, he declared, something better than boats would be wanted to cross the Mississippi, dividing the continent as it did, and he wanted the government to make a grant of land, twenty miles square, the proceeds from the sale of which might be used for a bridge fund. Goodhue's plans were for a bridge at St. Paul, but the construction of a bridge at St. Anthony had an obvious advantage, namely, that it would

not interfere with navigation. The editor of a St. Anthony newspaper prophesied that every dollar of capital invested in such an improvement would "add ten-fold to the value of property." ⁸

The legislature in 1853 authorized the relocation of a portion of the road from Point Douglas to St. Paul because its original location was unsatisfactory, but it was to be done on condition that none of the work "shall be at the expense of the Territory." The legislature also authorized the relocation of the western portion of the road from St. Anthony Falls to Willow River, which had been ordered laid out the previous year, likewise without additional expense to the territory. The construction of the military road from Point Douglas to Lake Superior opened an attractive vista of trade to the towns along the Mississippi River, but St. Paul and St. Anthony felt that they might lose out on a great deal of this trade because they were off the regular route of travel. To counteract the disadvantage of their location, therefore, they prevailed upon the legislature to authorize the construction of a road from St. Anthony, by way of Chisago Lake, to Taylor's Falls or some point on the military road

8. Laws, 1852, p. 19-21; Minnesota Pioneer, December 12, 1849, December 25, 1851; St. Anthony Express, February 21, 1852. Among the incorporators of the bridge company were Henry M. Rice, Franklin Steele, Henry H. Sibley, and John H. Stevens, all figures of prominence in Minnesota.

south of that town, and of a branch road from St. Paul, by way of Little Canada, to an intersection with the St. Anthony-Taylor's Falls road. The expense of laying out and constructing these roads was to be borne by the counties through which they passed. ⁹

The problem of opening the way into the "Suland" was again at the fore during this session of the legislature. As a result, a road from St. Anthony Falls, by way of the sawmill which Simon Stevens had built on the shores of Lake Minnetonka in 1852, to the western boundary of Sibley County was authorized. The legislature bound the territorial treasurer to pay the cost of laying out this road, provided that it would not amount to more than a hundred dollars. The road was intended to open a route, not only to the "Suland," but to the new fort on the upper Minnesota River as well. ¹⁰

The legislature of 1853 was not disposed to act upon applications for ferries, and consequently not a charter was granted. It is indicative of the interest in the new territory west of the Mississippi River, and the eagerness of the pioneers to get to it, that three bills for ferry charters across the Minnesota River were introduced, two of which requested locations

9. Laws, 1853, p. 56, 60, 62; Weekly Minnesotian, June 18, 1853.

10. Laws, 1853, p. 55; Upham and Dunlap, Minnesota Biographies, 742.

at Traverse des Sioux. The squatters upon the "Suland" were also sufficiently numerous to agitate for the opening of a road from the Cannon River country to Fort Ridgely. This, too, was denied them. ¹¹

By the time the next legislature met, the boom in the "Suland" was well under way. The first lands sold in this new domain were sold by the federal government during the spring, and they were located in the townships along the Mississippi River in the southeastern portion of the territory; nevertheless, the pioneers were moving into the choicest spots in the interior. At the forks of the Cannon and Straight rivers, the village of Faribault was being settled. Along the Minnesota River, Bloomington, Shakopee, Traverse des Sioux, Mankato, and a score of other towns were beginning a mushroom-like growth, which, the following year, became a boom. When Congress, in 1854, extended the right of pre-emption to the unsurveyed lands of the west, the squatters were made secure in their tenure. When their lands were brought up for sale, they had only to pay the minimum price of \$1.25 per acre, and no man could bid against them.

11. These bills are Council File numbers 4 and 8, and House File numbers 9 and 37. They are in the non-current archives of the secretary of state's office, which are in the custody of the Minnesota Historical Society. Most of the legislative bills cited may be found in those archives. Unless they are filed elsewhere the location of bills will hereafter not be designated.

The road between Lake Pepin and the Minnesota River was laid out by the end of October, 1852. It led from Read's Landing westward to Faribault and Traverse des Sioux, and thence along the west bank of the Minnesota to Mankato. Not to be outdone by their rivals at Read's Landing and Wabasha, the ambitious members of the Rollingstone colony, near the site of present-day Winona, and the settlers at Bonnell's Landing, opposite La Crosse, determined to open roads of their own to the Minnesota River, even though they did not have legislative sanction. By the summer of 1853 they were promising that their roads would be opened before fall. The road from St. Anthony Falls to the western boundary of Sibley County was opened in the summer of 1853. It extended from St. Anthony Falls, by way of Minnetonka and Henderson, another new town on the Minnesota River, westward to Fort Ridgely. Contemporary accounts do not praise the condition of the road, but it was passable, for a stage line between St. Paul and Fort Ridgely was operated over it. ¹²

Minnesota settlers had cause for fretting when they considered the inadequacy of their means of communication during the winter months. In the summer

12. Minnesota Democrat, June 30, July 28, October 20, 1852, July 13, 1853; Minnesota Pioneer, October 21, December 9, 1852, June 9, August 18, 25, December 1, 1853; Weekly Minnesctian, July 17, 1852; St. Anthony Express, July 1, December 31, 1853.

the steamboats plying on the Mississippi River brought the frontier its supplies, its mail, and its visitors. But the river was frozen over for four or five months of the year, and then the frontier was almost completely isolated. A road from Prairie du Chien to Willow River was opened on the Wisconsin side of the river in 1848, and this rough, roundabout road was Minnesota's sole land route to the outer world. But the Minnesota pioneers were determined to open a more direct route to the settled country to the south. They were aided by the businessmen of Dubuque who foresaw that a great deal of their business with the upper river country would be sacrificed to Prairie du Chien unless steps were taken to create a more favorable route of travel toward the northland. In March, 1852, John Wakefield of Dubuque suggested to the editor of the Minnesota Pioneer that Minnesotans and Dubuque businessmen cooperate to open a road. A number of routes were suggested for this road. One plan was to extend the military road along the west bank of the Mississippi from Wabasha to the Iowa line, where it would meet a road from Lansing. Another proposed route led northward from Decorah. There was also agitation for a road following the valleys of the Red Cedar and Straight rivers to Faribault, from which place there was already a wagon road to Mendota that had been used for almost thirty years by the traders at Alexander Faribault's post. Alternative

routes from Fort Atkinson to Mankato, and from Dubuque to Mankato or Traverse des Sioux were urged by the promoters of these embryo towns. ¹³

The legislature of 1854 authorized the laying out of two roads leading toward Dubuque. One of them was to extend southward from Read's Landing to the Iowa line. The other provided a route following the old trading road to Faribault, then up the valley of the Straight River "to a point on the Iowa line, in the direction of Fort Atkinson." The road from Read's Landing to the Iowa line required, according to contemporary ideas of road making, less than thirty-five miles of road construction. For the remainder of the distance, it was claimed, there already existed roads or natural trails. A triweekly mail was promised over this route, and one witness was found who declared that he had driven heavily loaded teams over the major portion of it. On March 11, 1854, a Dr. Andros, of Garnavillo, Iowa, completed what was hailed as the first overland trip by team from Iowa to St. Paul, demonstrating the feasibility of the road. The mail line was contracted for by John Frink and Company, and was scheduled to begin on July 1, 1854. ¹⁴

13. Minnesota Pioneer, March 4, July 1, 8, 22, August 5, 26, September 9, 23, October 7, 14, 28, 1852, April 7, 1853; Minnesota Democrat, March 24, August 4, September 22, 1852.

14. Laws, 1854, p. 64, 69; Minnesota Pioneer, January 5, 1854; Minnesota Democrat, March 15, July 19, 1854; Weekly Minnesotian, January 7, 1854; Daily Minnesotian, June 1, 1854.

Meanwhile, the Straight River Valley road was being laid out, and Alexander Faribault claimed that there would be no difficulty in driving a team over it even before any work was done. The claim seems to have been justified, for the commissioners who laid out the road reported that they met a train of nearly thirty wagons filled with Norwegians bound for Traverse des Sioux and Mankato, who were bringing with them a hundred and fifty head of cattle; and during the course of a single day's journey they saw two hundred emigrant wagons enroute to Minnesota. The commissioners placed stakes in the prairie sod at regular intervals, and returned, relying upon the wheels of following emigrant wagons to mark more permanently the emigrant trail which they laid out. ¹⁵

When the mail line was established, however, it followed neither of these routes. On July 18, 1854, the Daily Minnesotian announced the arrival in St. Paul, two days earlier, of a Frink and Walker stage, the first of a "regular line" that was about to be established between St. Paul and Dubuque. It had followed a route picked out by the agents of the company, which was approximately midway between the two roads opened by authority of the legislature. It entered Minnesota at Elliota and passed through Carimone, Chatfield, Rochester, Oronoco,

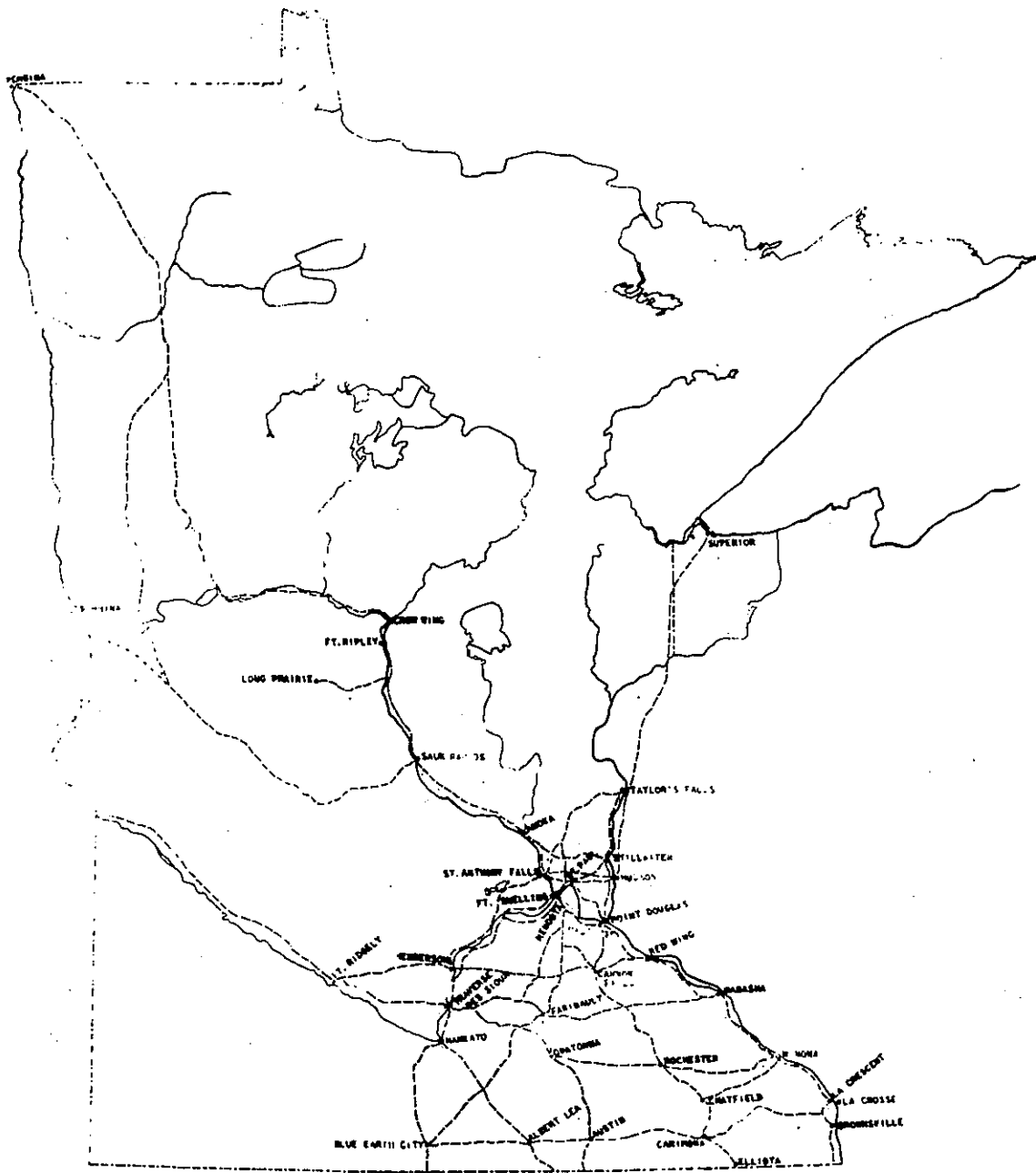
15. St. Paul Daily Times, June 30, July 6, 24, 1854; Daily Minnesotian, June 30, July 7, 1854; Minnesota Democrat, July 12, 1854; Minnesota Pioneer, January 5, 1854.

and Cannon Falls to St. Paul. Regular mail-stage service was begun late in August, and the route became so popular that the legislature of 1855 authorized the establishment of a new territorial road from St. Paul to Elliota. 16

These roads performed two very important functions. They provided an all-Minnesota communication with the Iowa communities, and they also furnished a means of getting into the fertile areas of the "Suland." The energetic citizens of Mankato added another route into the "Suland" by laying out a road southward to Fort Dodge. Another road that opened up a large area to settlement was built by the citizens of Traverse des Sioux, who, failing to get legislative sanction for a road from their town to Fort Ridgely, took up subscriptions and built one anyway, thereby entering into a spirited rivalry with Mankato and Henderson for the profitable business of transporting supplies to the garrison. 17

16. St. Paul Daily Times, July 19, November 22, 1854; Daily Minnesota Pioneer, December 1, 12, 1854; Minnesota Democrat, August 30, December 15, 20, 1854; January 3, August 22, 1855; Daily Minnesotian, July 18, December 9, 12, 19, 20, 1854, January 27, March 1, 16, May 5, July 26, 1855; Laws, 1855, p. 142. The new route proved popular for all kinds of travel. Burbank's express line adopted it in December, 1854, and the number of private conveyances that followed it was enormous. An interesting feature of this road was a lighthouse which was erected at Elliota to guide travelers along the prairie road. Daily Minnesotian, March 1, 1855.

17. Minnesota Democrat, November 17, 1852, April 5, 1854; Weekly Minnesotian, August 6, 1853; Minnesota Pioneer, April 20, 1854.



ROUTES OF TRAVEL IN MINNESOTA IN 1855



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

A new east and west road from Red Wing to Fort Ridgely was authorized by the legislature in 1854. By the end of July, the citizens of Red Wing had made a road to Faribault. From that point to the Minnesota River, they followed the Read's Landing-*Traverse des Sioux* road which had been laid out the previous year, and from *Traverse des Sioux* to Fort Ridgely the road recently opened by the people of *Traverse des Sioux*. Thus they opened a line of communication between Red Wing and the frontier outpost. In spite of the agitation of the previous two years, however, no territorial road was laid out westward from Winona. The people of Winona, therefore, on their own initiative undertook to build a connection with the mail-stage line which ran on the *Elliota* road.¹⁸ To aid the new towns on the west side of the Mississippi River, the legislature authorized the opening of a road from Minneapolis along the west side of the river to Sauk Rapids. Another road which came to serve a vital need was ordered laid out from St. Paul to Shakopee, and thence to *Traverse des Sioux*.¹⁹

When the frontier financiers saw that the Mississippi Bridge Company would turn out to be a profitable investment, they were easily persuaded of the financial possibilities of other bridges in the territory. Con-

18. Laws, 1854, p. 45, 46; Daily Minnesotian, July 25, 1854; Winona Republican, December 11, 1855.

19. Laws, 1854, p. 52, 68.

sequently, the legislature in 1854 incorporated three new bridge companies. The Minnesota Bridge Company was authorized to construct a toll bridge across the Mississippi River not more than two miles below the Falls of St. Anthony nor less than one mile from the Mississippi Bridge Company's structure. The franchise was to run for thirty-five years, and at the end of that time the bridge was to become a free bridge and the property of the county or counties in which it was built. Goodhue's dream of a bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Paul approached a step closer to realization in 1854. The legislature incorporated the St. Paul Bridge Company and authorized it to build a bridge across the river within the city, which, after thirty-five years, was to become the property of Ramsey and Dakota counties. An unusual feature of this charter was the inclusion of a clause permitting the city of St. Paul or Ramsey and Dakota counties to purchase a portion of the stock, provided that the people voted in favor of such an expenditure. The other toll bridge authorized by the legislature of 1854 was to be constructed over the St. Croix River at Taylor's Falls. Here again a proviso was made for the sale of the bridge to Polk County in Wisconsin and Chisago County in Minnesota in case it was desired to make it a free bridge, but the price could not be more than the total cost,

plus fifteen per cent. ²⁰

There were, therefore, four schemes for converting toll bridges into free bridges. The first method provided for the determination of value at a later date by the legislature, as shown in the charter for the Mississippi Bridge Company at St. Anthony. The second method provided for the purchase of bridge stock by the county or local governments concerned, as in the case of the St. Paul Bridge Company. The third method, which was used in the case of the Minnesota Bridge Company, provided that the toll bridge be converted into a free bridge, without further recompense to the builders, after thirty-five years. The last method fixed a maximum price before the bridge was constructed. It is evident that the trend in Minnesota was toward the construction of free bridges, rather than permanently owned, private toll structures. Private capital was utilized to build bridges, the construction of which would have been postponed for many years, if it had been necessary to wait until sufficient funds could be raised by public taxation to pay for them.

The optimism of the men who undertook to build these bridges was not unfounded. The bridge over the Mississippi at the Falls of St. Anthony was a startling financial success. The surveys for it were made during

20. Laws, 1854, p. 72-75, 87-89, 101.

the fall of 1853, and construction of a suspension bridge with a span of 620 feet, costing \$36,000, was begun the next spring. On December 5, 1854, it was opened to foot passengers, and on January 23, 1855, the structure was thrown open to traffic. The event was the occasion of a celebration, for the bridge was the first one ever built across the Mississippi River. Between five and six hundred persons gathered to join in the celebration, and over a hundred sleighs formed in line to cross it. Two months later, on March 25, 1855, the bridge collapsed in a terrific windstorm, but with dogged perseverance the owners proceeded to repair and rebuild it, and on July 4 it was again ready for travelers. The first day, the proprietors reported, the toll receipts amounted to about seventy dollars. During the remainder of July the total receipts of the bridge company reached the surprising sum of \$1,482. The St. Anthony Express jubilantly voiced the general opinion that the bridge was doing more to aid travel and communication than the old ferry ever could have done, and added that "there can be but little doubt but the stock will pay well enough." That fall the bridge was reported to be paying a twenty-four per cent dividend, and for 1856, the bridge company reported, the bridge tolls totaled "upwards of \$19,000." 21

21. Minnesota Pioneer, November 24, 1853; Daily Minnesota Pioneer, December 4, 1854, March 28, 1855; Daily

The completion of this bridge spurred on the efforts of the incorporators of the bridge companies formed in 1854. In the winter of 1856 the bridge at Taylor's Falls, a structure 150 feet long, was opened to traffic. In its first year it paid a dividend of twenty per cent to the stockholders, which was declared to be "doing very well for a new country."²² The proprietors of the Minnesota Bridge Company and the St. Paul Bridge Company had difficulty in getting their work started. The legislature in 1856, therefore, obligingly extended the time limit within which they were required to begin work or else forfeit their charters. The Minnesota Bridge Company completed its structure in April, 1857, thereby opening a new approach to the west side of the river. Work was begun on the St. Paul bridge in 1856,

Pioneer and Democrat, March 14, 1857; St. Anthony Express, December 9, 1854, January 13, 27, March 31, July 7, August 11, September 29, 1855; Daily Minnesotian, January 18, November 26, 1855; Minnesota Democrat, February 28, 1855. The organization of the bridge company was effected on October 25, 1853. The company at first planned to build a frame abutment type of bridge, but the engineer in charge of construction persuaded them that a suspension bridge could be built within the limits of their capital. St. Anthony Express, December 9, 1854. The account of the celebration of the bridge opening occupied almost the whole issue of the St. Anthony Express for January 27, 1855.

22. Saint Croix Union, November 3, 1855; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, December 29, 1856; Warner and Foote, eds., Washington County, 306. The Union stated that the Chicago County authorities were taking bids for the bridge, that the probable cost of the structure would be about \$45,000, and that the contractor took stock valued at \$1,500 in partial payment for his work.

but the contractor went through bankruptcy that fall, and the company almost lost the money it had invested. With difficulty the proprietors salvaged their stock and obtained the services of a new bridge builder. By December, 1856, the piers had been erected, and the superstructure was about to be put in place, when that contractor failed. The undertaking was a big one for that day -- the estimated cost of the bridge was between \$110,000 and \$120,000 -- but it was so important that every effort was made to keep the work going. When a lack of funds again halted the work in August, 1857, however, the proprietors almost gave up, for their efforts to obtain funds were unavailing -- men with money would invest only when they had a guarantee of three per cent per month.

The legislature, however, had provided the germ of an idea for saving the company when it incorporated in its charter the clause permitting St. Paul and Ramsey or Dakota counties to purchase stock. In desperation the proprietors asked the city to lend its credit to insure the completion of the bridge. To do this, however, legislative sanction had to be obtained, and, accordingly, the first legislature of the state of Minnesota granted permission for holding an election in St. Paul to vote on the question of lending the credit of the city to the bridge company. The result of the election, on March 24, 1858, was overwhelmingly in favor

of the measure, and, with the bonds of the city as security, the company had no difficulty in negotiating with eastern capitalists for funds to complete the bridge. The structure crossed the Mississippi at Wabasha Street, and its length from one abutment to the other was 1,300 feet. There were nine piers, the highest of which was seventy feet above low water, and they were placed far enough apart to permit the widest log rafts to pass. The roadway consisted of two tracks with footpaths, and it was built on a five per cent grade, with the lower end on the West St. Paul side of the river. A visitor to St. Paul in 1864 described it as "a most distressingly untraditional bridge, all on the oblique and very awkward, like a great clumsy fire-escape propped up against a high wall." 23

During the years from 1854 to 1858 Minnesota was attaining the maturity of statehood, and its population expanded from an estimated 32,000 to a probable 160,000. In 1854 the occupation of the great "Suland" was an idealist's dream; by the end of the territorial period

23. Laws, 1856, p. 75, 107, 1858, p. 168-171; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, December 8, 1856, April 5, 21, 25, September 5, 15, 1857, March 17, 24, 25, April 25, May 13, 20, 1858; Bertha L. Heilbron, ed., "An English Visitor of the Civil War Period," in Minnesota History, 9: 284 (September, 1928). The St. Paul bridge was completed in the summer of 1859. Common Council of the City of St. Paul, Proceedings, 1860, p. 109-111. In 1874, the bonds of the city for the bridge having been redeemed, it became a free bridge. Williams, Saint Paul, 449.

it was reality. In 1854 the trading posts along the upper Mississippi River were just beginning to take on the semblance of frontier towns; by 1858 such communities as Anoka, Elk River, St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Little Falls were flourishing business centers for an ever-expanding trading area. At the head of Lake Superior the beginnings of modern Duluth and Superior were made in 1853 and 1854. By 1858 those villages had a firm foothold. The St. Croix Valley, the oldest part of Minnesota in point of years of occupation by white settlers, was a flourishing farming and lumbering center. Frontier real estate promoters at the end of the territorial period were laying out townsites in the fertile valley of the Red River, and the missionary and trader frontiers were moving westward and northward. A vast portion of northern and western Minnesota was still unoccupied in 1858, but the initial frontier stage in the development of economic life was a thing of the past in the great agricultural districts of eastern and southern Minnesota.

During the boom years the territory found that its preparations for settlers, including road facilities, were pitifully inadequate. To meet the emergency, the legislature of 1855 authorized the opening of thirty-eight roads, while the next session ordered ninety-nine territorial roads laid out. Both the regular and special sessions of 1857 were preoccupied with the impending

problems of statehood, and only one of the score or more of road bills that were introduced was passed.

The road was to extend from the Big Sioux River a short distance above Sioux City, along the Missouri River to a point opposite the mouth of the Running Water River -- on the present-day line between Nebraska and South Dakota where the Missouri River dips farthest to the south. ²⁴

To keep pace with the expanding road system, the legislature granted nineteen ferry charters in 1855, and in 1856 thirteen bills chartering forty-five ferries were passed. The regular session of 1857 granted ferry charters to five companies, and the extra session, in the flurry to clean up unfinished territorial business, authorized thirty-six more. The majority of the charters granted during those three years were for ferries across streams well within the limits of the future state, but the extra session of 1857 stepped outside those limits to accommodate travelers through the still unsettled west. Three charters were for ferries across the Red

24. Laws, 1855, p. 49-53, 1856, p. 119-152, 1857, extra session, 318; Esther Jerabek, comp., A Bibliography of Minnesota Territorial Documents, items 463, 490, 527, 539, 542, 543, 552, 589, 595, 596, 603, 604, 607, 616, 625, 651, 657, 658, 663, 727, 753, 786 (Minnesota Historical Society, Special Bulletins, no. 3 -- St. Paul, 1936). No part of the cost of laying out or constructing the road from the Big Sioux to the Missouri River was to be borne by the territory. The reason for this careful exclusion of expense was the imminence of statehood. It already was certain that the western boundary of the state of Minnesota would be east of the eastern terminus of this road.

River, and two, for ferries across the Big Sioux River. Farther west, a ferry across the James River was authorized, and provision was made for three ferries across the Missouri River. ²⁵

At the same time, the territory was moving as rapidly as possible to provide adequate bridges. Fifteen bridge companies were incorporated during this three-year period, most of which were for structures across the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers. One company was incorporated to build a bridge across the Zumbro River in Wabasha County, another was authorized to build across the Elk River, and a third, across the Minnesota River in Le Sueur County. Few of these were completed during the territorial period. The bridges at the Falls of St. Anthony were operating with great financial success, and so was that over the St. Croix. At Watab Anson Northup completed his bridge by the fall of 1857, and at Little Falls the bridge of the Little Falls Manufacturing Company was opened. One newspaper commentator in 1857 claimed that ten bridges over the Mississippi above St. Louis were completed, or in process of construction. ²⁶

25. Laws, 1855, p. 20-22, 34, 70-72, 80, 91, 96, 99, 115-117, 119-123, 134-137, 143, 145, 151, 165, 1856, p. 154-175, 1857, regular session, 154-156, 214, 222, 226-228, 268-270, 1857, extra session, 62-66, 159, 182, 203, 212, 225, 296.

26. Laws, 1856, p. 233, 261, 1857, regular session, 282; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, March 17, 1858; Winona Republican, October 28, 1857; Chatfield Republican, March 21, 1857.

Undoubtedly a great many of the roads which the legislature, during the last three years of the territory, ordered opened could have been opened by the united action of the different counties affected without a legislative act. Many of them probably were authorized to enable political leaders to repay their supporters. To disinterested spectators, the activity of the legislature in laying out roads during 1855 and 1856 seemed unjustifiable, and one of them compared the legislature to a "commissioners' court." Yet, the rush of settlers into the territory justified the activity. A great portion of the country was still inaccessible to home seekers, but, in those regions where there were roads into the hinterland, settlement grew rapidly. One contemporary observer, writing a brief historical sketch of St. Anthony at the beginning of 1854, commented that "the settlement of Minnesota has thus far been confined to the principal rivers, and to the shores of that beautiful series of Lakes, known under the general name of Minnetonka. There is probably not a farm-house, or cabin of a white man, at a distance of ten miles from navigable water, in the whole Territory." 27

Before the rush of immigration got under way in the middle fifties, the principal arteries of travel from north to south and from east to west had been out-

27. Saint Peter Courier, February 12, 1856; St. Anthony Express, January 28, 1854.

lined in the southeastern portion of the territory, and the organized counties did their share in opening local roads. Consequently, incoming settlers suffered less from the lack of roads than pessimists thought. Other portions of the territory were less prepared to care for settlers, however. Much of Minnesota north of the territorial capital was as effectively blocked off as though a stone wall stood in the way. The federal government, it is true, was pledged to build military roads northward to Lake Superior and northwestward to Fort Ripley. But progress on these roads was slow, and at best they offered access to but a small portion of the country. The old Red River trails to the western areas were called upon to supplement the existing roads, opening for settlement the area through which they passed. The settlers at the head of Lake Superior clamored for haste in opening the Point Douglas-St. Louis River road, and, when their pleas failed to effect action, they opened a rough road of their own. The citizens of St. Paul and St. Anthony, equally eager for the completion of the military road, began to reach out with a series of territorial roads which they persuaded the legislature to authorize. The legislature of 1853 had sanctioned the opening of a road from St. Anthony Falls and St. Paul northward to Taylor's Falls, where it was to join the military road and divert to the two towns a portion of the trade which Minnesotans felt would develop

over the lake route as soon as the Sault Ste. Marie Canal was opened. New roads to tap this reservoir of trade were authorized by the legislature in 1854 and again in 1855. 28

In the fall of 1854 a number of St. Paul men set out on their own initiative to explore a route to Lake Superior. A practicable road, they claimed, could be made along a route about fifty miles long extending through Little Canada and the "Rice Lakes" in southeastern Anoka County to Grindstone Creek near its junction with Kettle River. Here, a few miles east of the site of modern Hinckley, it would join the military road from Point Douglas to Lake Superior. In 1855 the legislature authorized the opening of a territorial road over the route. It was opened the following year, the greater

28. Laws, 1854, p. 43, 1855, p. 51; St. Anthony Express, April 15, 29, September 9, 1854; Minnesota Democrat, April 19, 1854; Daily Minnesotian, July 11, 1854. The St. Anthony Express for April 15, 1854, notes that the commissioners were laying out the road, which connected with the military road twenty-four miles from St. Anthony. The route is described as being seven miles shorter than the existing road, and requiring only twelve miles of new construction, the balance following old roads. The Express for September 9, 1854, however, complained of the lack of information about the road, and wished to know whether or not the commissioners had actually located it. The commissioners were charged with having been negligent in the performance of their duties, "for an avenue of communication so important to the interests of St. Anthony, ought by no means to have been neglected." The Daily Minnesotian for July 19, 1854, also complained of the slowness in opening the road.

portion of the cost being paid by St. Paul citizens. 29

The frontier communities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Little Falls were as eager to establish contact with that region which so many believed would soon develop into a great port of entry for Minnesota-bound immigrants and goods as were St. Paul and St. Anthony. Their sentiments were expressed by Judge Bradley M. Meeker in the summer of 1855, when he outlined what he thought were the minimum requirements for transportation facilities in the upper country.

We want a broad tread, people's road built [to the head of Lake Superior] by the way of Mille Lac, branching at that point down Rum River to Anoka, and towards Morrison at the mouth of Crow Wing. At this place (Sauk Rapids) it would intersect the military road now about completed from Point Douglass [sic] to Fort Ripley; and crossing here a branch should pass down through the river counties on the west side, by St. Cloud and Monticello, Minneapolis and Fort Snelling. Another branch should pass off southerly in the direction of Fort Ridgely, penetrating the rich country drained by the two branches of the Crow River, whilst another should stretch away northwesterly towards the Big Bend of the Missouri. . . . We must have a road from the Great Lake to our interior.

The road to Lake Superior, because of its directness, would, he felt, be ideal for a railroad, "the first section of the grand Northern Emigrant Route to the Pacific." Judge Meeker thought that the national gov-

29. Daily Minnesotian, April 14, December 8, 1855; Daily Minnesota Pioneer, April 24, May 23, 24, 1855; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, April 12, 1857. The latter article itemizes the cost of the old bridge over the Rice Lakes which had been repaired in 1856. The cost was largely met by gifts of businessmen of St. Paul, and by a contribution of \$300 from Ramsey County.

ernment could be induced to appropriate \$30,000 for the construction of the road, and this, he was sure, would be ample for the purpose. 30

Judge Meeker stirred up not only the people of the upper country, but those of St. Anthony as well. The editor of the St. Anthony Express pleaded with his readers to "go up and not down to buy our stores. Open a new inlet for immigration -- a new route for pleasure travelers, and then stand by and see the rush." At the same time, Clement H. Beaulieu, a trader at Crow Wing, gave loud publicity to the necessity for a road from Lake Superior to Crow Wing "in supplying the various military posts in the north of Minnesota" as well as providing an entry for supplies for the lumbering industry already being developed. That fall a group of St. Cloud property owners, led by George F. Brott, principal promoter of the town, explored a route which passed along the northern shore of Mille Lacs, then turned eastward to join the Point Douglas-St. Louis River military road. A short time later a member of the territorial legislature, William Sturgis of Little Falls, marked out a route from his home to Mille Lacs, where it joined the road laid out by Brott. He was followed by still another road-locating party, one led by Anson Northup, which laid out a road from Crow Wing to the Brott road.

By the time winter set in, therefore, a route had been established from Superior to Mille Lacs, with branches to Crow Wing, Little Falls, and St. Cloud. The enthusiastic backers of these routes obtained the passage of an act in 1856 legalizing the roads and declaring them to be territorial roads. Equally enthusiastic supporters of the movement at Superior provided liberal contributions of men, money, and supplies, and began to build the eastern portion, while parties from St. Cloud, Little Falls, and Crow Wing began work on their sections of it, and by the end of March a passable road had been opened from Lake Superior to the Mississippi River. 31

The opening of this road troubled St. Paul businessmen, for, if the capital was to retain its domination over the other towns of Minnesota, it had to retain a lead in the development of its transportation facilities. The Kettle River road did not provide a satisfactory summer outlet to the Lake Superior country, for much of the country through which it was built was swampy, and construction was difficult and expensive. The swamps were small obstacles to winter travel, but St. Paulites wanted an all-year-round road. In the early spring of 1856 a road was opened from Bayfield, Wisconsin, through

31. St. Anthony Express, August 25, December 1, 8, 15, 1855, April 12, 1856; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, November 8, 30, 1855, January 5, 22, February 12, April 4, 1856; Daily Minnesotan, August 24, 1855; Sauk Rapids Frontierman, September 25, October 3, 1856; Laws, 1856, p. 136.

the lake region of northwestern Wisconsin to the military road at Taylor's Falls. On November 20, 1856, a regular mail-stage service was begun over this route. The stage ran but twice a month, but it provided a connection with territorial Minnesota. St. Paul was warned to be prepared to receive an overwhelming flood of immigrants by this new route the following season, for Bayfield, not Superior, it was predicted, would henceforth be the favored port on the lake. The road was built at an expense of thousands of dollars, said one resident of Bayfield, and it was entirely "a private affair; assistance has neither been received nor asked for from other quarters." 32

The discussion about these roads through northeastern Minnesota focused attention on a wide area of virgin timber and reputedly rich farming lands, but the financial difficulties in the way of building good roads through this area were great. The legislature of 1856 asked Congress to appropriate funds for the construction of the road from St. Paul to Kettle River on the grounds that it offered a direct route to Lake Superior. When their prayer was unanswered in 1856, they repeated it in 1857, and added a request for funds to construct a military road from Pigeon River, on the northern boundary, to Fond du Lac, and thence westward,

32. Daily Pioneer and Democrat, November 30, 1856, June 4, August 23, November 17, 1856, March 23, 1857.

over the Brott route, to Mille Lacs and Fort Ripley.

This request also was denied. 33

Other areas, too, were calling for the attention of the road makers of territorial Minnesota. The Red River Valley long had attracted the trader's fancy, for out of it came the great annual caravans of the settlement at Pembina, laden with furs and hides. A military road up the east bank of the Mississippi River made easier the long and difficult journey as far as Fort Ripley. Beyond that point, however, the travelers still had to depend entirely upon the rough natural roads made by the caravans, and these at best were unsatisfactory. James M. Goodhue from his first appearance in St. Paul had recognized the commercial importance of this region, and Governor Ramsey had pleaded for the development of its trade in his first message to the legislature. In 1853 the editor of the St. Paul Minnesotian made lavish estimates of the commercial advantages which would accrue to St. Paul by the construction of a road over the dry and practicable route from Fort Snelling westward to the Red River. The road was

33. Laws, 1856, p. 373, 1857, regular session, p. 292, 294. Even in 1854 the legislature had dreamed of tapping this great interior country. At that time a memorial to Congress asked for an appropriation for the construction of a road from St. Paul, by way of Little Canada and the western branch of the Sunrise River in Chicago County, to a point on the Rum River in the southwestern portion of what today is Isanti County. Laws, 1854, p. 164.

not built during the territorial period, but in 1855 the legislature authorized the opening of a road from Fort Ripley to a point on the Red River opposite the mouth of the Pembina River, and the same session adopted a memorial asking for a federal appropriation for its construction. In 1856 the legislature asked Congress for an appropriation to open a road on the west side of the Mississippi River from Fort Snelling to Pembina. Neither petition was directly granted, but Congress did grant an appropriation for the removal of timber along the Red River road from Crow Wing to the Red River. 34

A road from St. Cloud to the Red River trail in the upper part of the Sauk Valley was ordered opened by the legislature of 1855. In 1856 this road was extended to the Red River, at the mouth of the Bois des Sioux River, and thence to Pembina. That same year an independent group from Henderson did its part to open a way to the Red River Valley by establishing a road from Henderson to the mouth of the Bois des Sioux River by way of Glencoe, Hutchinson, and Red Cedar Island Lake in Kandiyohi County. It was reported that Joseph Rolette of Pembina would send his caravan of Red River carts that way in 1856, and the prediction was made that the new road would become "the most im-

34. Ante, p. 69, 97; Weekly Minnesotian, August 6, 1853; Laws, 1855, p. 51, 182, 1856, p. 208, 360.

portant thoroughfare in the Territory." However, no record of Rolette's train passing over this route has been found, and it is doubtful that the road became a popular one. 35

During the early years of the fifties, the greater portion of the roads authorized by the legislature had been opened in the southeastern portion of the territory. After 1855 an increasingly large proportion of road legislation was devoted to the opening of roads in the western and southwestern portions. The session of 1856, for instance, ordered four roads laid out from St. Cloud -- to Lac qui Parle, to Forest City, to Lake Traverse and beyond to Fort Union, and to Long Prairie. A road to connect the frontier forts -- Ripley and Ridgely -- was also ordered opened, and a host of roads were authorized for the region between these points and the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers to the south. It was during these years that the settlements in the Big Woods area between the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers were being made. Settlers in the portion of the territory east of the Minnesota already had assumed the complacent attitude of the elder brother toward these struggling fledglings of the west. 36

It was the territorial legislature which authorized

35. Laws, 1855, p. 141, 1856, p. 122; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, June 5, 1856.

36. Laws, 1856, p. 123-132, 135-139, 143, 144, 147.

the opening of these roads, but little of the total cost of doing so was borne by the territory. In a few cases where a road passed through country which was not yet organized into counties, or where white population was too sparse to pay for laying it out, the legislature did provide that the territorial treasurer should pay the costs. This was true, for example, in the case of the road extending from the foot of Lake Pepin to the Minnesota River, which was authorized in 1852, but the total of such expenditures apparently was not great. The territory spent approximately \$1,400 for laying out roads up to 1855, but in the last part of the territorial period, the legislature took advantage of every opportunity to avoid any such expense. For example, the laws authorizing the opening of territorial roads from St. Cloud, Little Falls, and Crow Wing to Mille Lacs, and thence to Lake Superior, merely empowered the men who had explored the routes to deposit copies of the plats of the routes with the officers of the counties through which the roads passed, and declared the roads to be territorial roads. No attempt was made to compensate any of them for the work they had performed. 37

37. The reports of the territorial auditor show that the following items were expended for laying out roads: in 1850, \$481.50; in 1851, \$88.50; in 1853, \$638; in 1855, \$197.43. The auditor's reports are contained in Council Journals, 1851, p. 189, 1852, p. 163, 1853, p. 163-166, 1854, appendix, 29, 1856, appendix, 18.

The counties assumed the greater proportion of the expense of laying out roads and constructing them. Not only did they pay the cost of laying out territorial roads, but that of opening such roads as the commissioners of the counties deemed necessary. How large this item of expense was in comparison with the other expenses of county government is difficult to determine, but it was an appreciable proportion of county outlay. In Fillmore County, for example, the total county expenses for roads and bridges for 1857 approximated \$2,475 of a total county expenditure of about \$15,730, or a little less than one-sixth. The largest single item in this expenditure for roads was for bridges, which accounted for \$1,455. The remainder of the costs for roads included expenditures for locating roads, totaling \$315, fees for technical services -- surveyors, chainmen, and axmen -- amounting to \$320, and the salaries paid to road supervisors, which totaled \$385. In Winona County the total expenditure for roads and bridges for the twenty-month period from January, 1857, to September, 1858, amounted to about \$2,780, while during the five years from 1854 to 1858 the total amount expended for this purpose was about \$3,700. How many miles of road were constructed during the territorial period in these counties is likewise unknown, but Houston County, which adjoins Winona and Fillmore counties, was reported to have a total of 5,400 miles

of road in 1858, and the total in these other counties could not have been much less. 38

When a county or the territory failed to open roads to provide mail and stage service for a community or to enhance its position as a market center, contributions were sought from businessmen and other public-spirited citizens to raise the necessary funds, the expenditure of which was entrusted to one of their number or to a committee of citizens. The Dodd road, which was built in 1853 from Traverse des Sioux to St. Paul, was financed in this way. During the same year a bridge on the road from Kaposia to St. Paul fell into such a state of disrepair that it was unsafe for use. When the county failed to repair it, St. Paul merchants raised seventy-five or eighty dollars in five-dollar contributions to finance the work. St. Anthony merchants in 1854 raised money in the same way to build a road to Lake Minnetonka, and a committee of businessmen supervised the construction of the road by the contractor. In the fall of 1857 the businessmen of Winona, rebelling against the intolerable condition of the road leading to Stockton, donated more than \$4,000 to build a new road which led on an easy gradient up the hill

38. Chatfield Democrat, January 27, 1858; Winona Republican, October 27, 1858; Hokah Chief, September 25, 1858.

to the prairie beyond. 39

Sometimes the labor of building a new road was performed by the citizens themselves. During the summer of 1852 the people on the west side of the Mississippi River appealed to the citizens of St. Paul to help them build a road to St. Paul. The people along the Zumbro River, twenty-five miles inland from Red Wing, had trouble finding a passable road to the latter place. To help solve their difficulties, the people of Red Wing turned out in a body to construct a road from Red Wing to the Zumbro settlement. There were also occasional public-spirited men like John Morgan, proprietor of the Halfway House on the road from St. Paul to Stillwater, who cut a road around the swamp near his hostelry and built a bridge over a brook near by, "making that part of the Stillwater road very good." 40

In view of the overwhelming number of new roads that the frontier needed, it is not surprising that private contributions or voluntary labor on the part of citizens should have supplemented the labor tax which the law required. A statement by a road supervisor in Houston County illustrates the essential weakness of

39. Ante, p. 64; Minnesota Pioneer, December 29, 1853; St. Anthony Express, October 1, November 19, December 17, 1853; Winona Republican, August 25, September 1, 8, November 9, December 23, 1857.

40. Minnesota Pioneer, July 8, 22, 1852; Daily Minnesotian, July 26, 1854; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, May 20, 1858; Minnesota Democrat, June 17, 1851.

the statute labor method of building roads. An important road from Hokah to the Mississippi River needed repairing, but, since "there is not at present any road tax to be worked out," he called for volunteers to do the work. After the required labor tax was paid and the limited road and bridge fund was expended, there was no way of getting work done except by volunteer workers, or by workers paid by private donations. The residents of McLeod County in 1855 were almost desperate for roads, but they were not able to construct those already laid out. The Crow River Valley, north and west of Glencoe, was in a similar predicament. By doing only what was required to enable wagons to pass through the forests, a road to Monticello was opened in the summer of 1856. In the face of criticism from incoming settlers, those on hand labored feverishly to open trails to communities on established roads or on navigable streams. The overburdened road supervisor bore the brunt of the criticism; sometimes the fault was his, but it cannot be denied that his task was an onerous one. The frontier settlers were poor, and the aversion to heavy taxation was acute. 41

41. Post, p. 222, 228; Hokah Chief, September 18, 1858; St. Paul Daily Times, November 9, December 5, 1855; Minnesota Democrat, July 11, August 4, 1855, June 28, 1856; Minnesota Pioneer, May 6, 1852, July 21, 1853; Weekly Minnesotian, May 28, June 25, July 2, December 3, 1853, June 25, 1858; Winona Republican, June 23, 1857; Daily Pioneer and Democrat, June 27, 1856, April 5, 1857; Daily Minnesota Pioneer, March 14, 1855. K. K.

Opening roads in Minnesota was made urgent by many factors, and of these the demand for regular and frequent delivery of mail was of major importance. In 1849, when the territory had a population of less than 5,000, frequent mail deliveries scarcely could have been expected. Yet, the settlers in the St. Croix Valley demanded better mail service during the fall of 1848, and futile attempts were made to obtain mail facilities for the trading posts in the Mississippi Valley and for Pembina. At the opening of the territorial period there was one main mail route, which extended from Prairie du Chien up the Mississippi River to Minnesota. The service was at first semimonthly, but in 1849 weekly mail service during the summer months was inaugurated. A request by Goodhue for additional service was denied, because, the postmaster general replied, even under the weekly plan, the receipts amounted

Peck of Le Sueur in a letter to Sibley dated December 3, 1853, asked for information to assist in laying out a road to connect his settlement with the Doda road. This letter is in the Sibley Papers. The article in the Daily Times for November 9, 1855, refers to opposition on the part of Carver County citizens to a heavy burden of taxation, of which a large proportion was occasioned by an extensive road-building program. The Minnesotian for December 3, 1853, contains an extensive arraignment of the conduct of the local road supervisor, who, by irregular procedure in allowing the commutation of the poll tax at a lesser rate than the law required, had imperiled the whole road building and repairing program of the county. The article complained that because of these irregularities people would neither pay the commutation money nor perform labor on the roads.

to only a fourth of the expenditures. Goodhue was bitter about the lack of mail facilities. "No mail to Long Meadow," he lamented, "no mail to Crow Wing, no mail to Fort Gaines, no; not even to St. Anthony. . . . We have no mails up the Saint Peters. . . . The villages of the Saint Croix are destitute of mails." ⁴²

In the fall of 1850 the number of routes serving Minnesota was increased to seven, extending to most of the areas then settled, and by 1854 there were twenty-five duly authorized routes in the territory. By the end of the territorial period approximately a hundred routes were in use, but the expansion of the mail service was far behind the expansion of settlement, and its inadequacy was one of the major complaints of the territorial settlers. For a major portion of the territory, the distribution of the mail necessitated the use of land routes. At first, it was possible to deliver mail on horseback, as the contractor for mail delivery between St. Paul and Stillwater did during the summer of 1852, but soon the volume of mail was much greater than could be accommodated on the back of a horse, which, perforce, must also bear a rider. Hence, there arose the necessity for the construction of roads upon which the mail carrier could drive a mail conveyance. ⁴³

42. Minnesota Pioneer, August 16, 1849, January 23, 1850.

43. Arthur J. Larsen, "Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle, 1849-60," in Minnesota History, 11: 399-401 (December, 1930); Minnesota Pioneer, October 7, 1852.

From the very beginning of the period, the problem of mail delivery was bound up with another service coveted by frontiersmen. The landlocked interior had to have a means for the conveyance of travelers, and to fill this need the stagecoach appeared upon the Minnesota scene. It seldom was profitable for a man to contract to cover long distances with the mail at regular intervals. He had an opportunity to profit only if he combined the delivery of mail with some other enterprise, and the logical combination was that of mail delivery with passenger and express service. Moreover, if undertaken singly, they involved a duplication of necessary services. Too often, however, the combination was not on an equal basis, the mail service suffering in favor of the passenger traffic -- if one interprets seriously the references to mail bags which were thrown off in order that more passengers might be carried. ⁴⁴

The first regular mail-stage line in Minnesota was put in operation during the spring of 1849 between St. Paul and Stillwater by Robert Kennedy, who, on May 6, announced the opening of a triweekly stage line between the two places. During that summer he carried the mail without compensation from the government. During 1849

44. See, for example, a letter signed "Tamarack" in the Daily Pioneer and Democrat for April 10, 1856, and an article entitled "Our Present Mail Arrangements," in the issue of the same paper for December 3, 1857.



The St. Paul-Superior stages and drivers getting Superior on the opening of the Lake Superior
& Miss. RR from St. Paul to Duluth in August, 1870. For ten years prior to 1870
leaving these stages transported passengers and the mails between Superior and
St. Paul via the old Military Road.

FRONTIER STAGECOACHES

[From a photograph in the possession of
the Minnesota Historical Society.]



a stage line was opened between St. Anthony and St. Paul, and here, too, the proprietor of the stage line carried the mail free. A regular stage line was put into operation between St. Paul and Prairie du Chien after the close of navigation on the Mississippi River in the fall of that year by the mail contractor over the route. Others followed in different parts of the territory as rapidly as mail routes were authorized and settlement begun. At the beginning of 1852 John W. Corbett and Company of St. Paul bought Charles W. W. Borup's mail contract over the route from St. Paul to Crow Wing and put a weekly stage into operation. In the late summer of 1853 a mail-stage service between St. Paul and Fort Ridgely was begun. The Frink and Walker mail-stage line between St. Paul and Dubuque on the Elliotts road was started in August, 1854, and that fall a mail-passenger service between St. Paul and Superior was inaugurated over the rough trail chopped through the woods of the north country. A tendency for one firm to monopolize mail contracts and stage lines early became evident, and the rise of the Minnesota Stage Company, headed by James C. Burbank and his associates, constitutes the outstanding example of such monopoly. By the end of the territorial period this firm had ousted the Frink and Walker Company, and in 1865 it was reported to be operating over sixteen hundred miles of routes, employing a vast army of station

men, drivers, and stablemen. 45

The stagecoach was a potent factor in the opening and improving of frontier roads. To facilitate the arrival of the stagecoach, the people of the inland regions of Minnesota eagerly opened trails which they improved as opportunity and finances permitted, and the stagecoach companies themselves were road makers. The road from Elliota to St. Paul by way of Rochester and Cannon Falls, for example, was opened by the employees of the firm of Frink and Walker, in co-operation with the few settlers along the way. Other instances of the initiative of stagecoach companies are recorded. The Minnesota Stage Company, for example, in the closing months of the territorial period, planned a stage route from St. Cloud, up the Sauk River Valley, to Fort Abercrombie on the Red River. The legislature of 1856 had authorized the opening of a road along this route, and, indeed, one had been laid out. When it came time for the inauguration of the stage service, however, no adequate road had been made. Captain Russell Blakeley,

45. Minnesota Pioneer, May 12, August 21, 1849, July 18, 1850, September 29, November 3, 1853; Minnesota Democrat, January 21, 1852; St. Anthony Express, June 24, 1854; Robert Kennedy to Sibley, March 12, July 17, 1850, in Sibley Papers; Larsen, in Minnesota History, 11: 401-405; Larsen, "The Northwestern Express and Transportation Company," in North Dakota Historical Quarterly, 6: 42-54 (October, 1931); Luella Swenson, "Stage Coaching Days in Minnesota," 3. The latter is a term paper prepared in 1927 for a course in Minnesota history at Hamline University, St. Paul. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy.

then general manager of the company, detailed a road-making crew to open a road suitable for the passage of the stage. The road was not perfect, but it was practicable, and over it the Red River stages of the company clattered and bumped their way for more than a decade. In the fall of 1858 the same company, which had the mail contract over the route from St. Paul to La Crosse, spent \$3,000 in improving the road between Wabasha and Winona. George Nettleton, one of the proprietors of Superior, Wisconsin, and the owner of the stage line, was among the most active of the workers who cut the winter stage road from Superior to Taylor's Falls in 1854. Thus, people and stage men worked together to promote intercourse, and to do that, they had to build roads over which heavy stagecoaches could be drawn at a reasonably rapid rate, without undue discomfort to the traveler. 46

The opening of roads meant much to the inhabitants of the outposts of civilization: the promoters of frontier towns boasted of their location at crossroads; the opening of a mail route was an event of prime importance; the arrival of a regularly scheduled stagecoach was an occasion for genuine rejoicing. The newspapers of the territorial period are filled with glowing descriptions of boom towns which, mushroom-like, were springing

46. Larsen, in Minnesota History, 11: 407; Primmer, in Minnesota History, 15: 283.

into existence, and rarely is such a description found which does not boast of the "remarkable" facilities for communication which the town afforded. Inadequate and poorly made as the roads were, they carried the life blood of the frontier. Where two important roads crossed, there a town was sure to spring up. Where travelers crossed a river on a ferry, an enterprising promoter would soon found a town. Wherever facilities for communication existed, or could be made, the growth of population and the progress of settlement quickened. Without roads, the struggling villages of the Minnesota frontier could not endure long; with roads, even the most insignificant of them might some day hope to attain a position of prime commercial importance among its neighbors. 47

47. Larson, in Minnesota History, 11: 397-399.