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THE TONIC OF WILDNESS

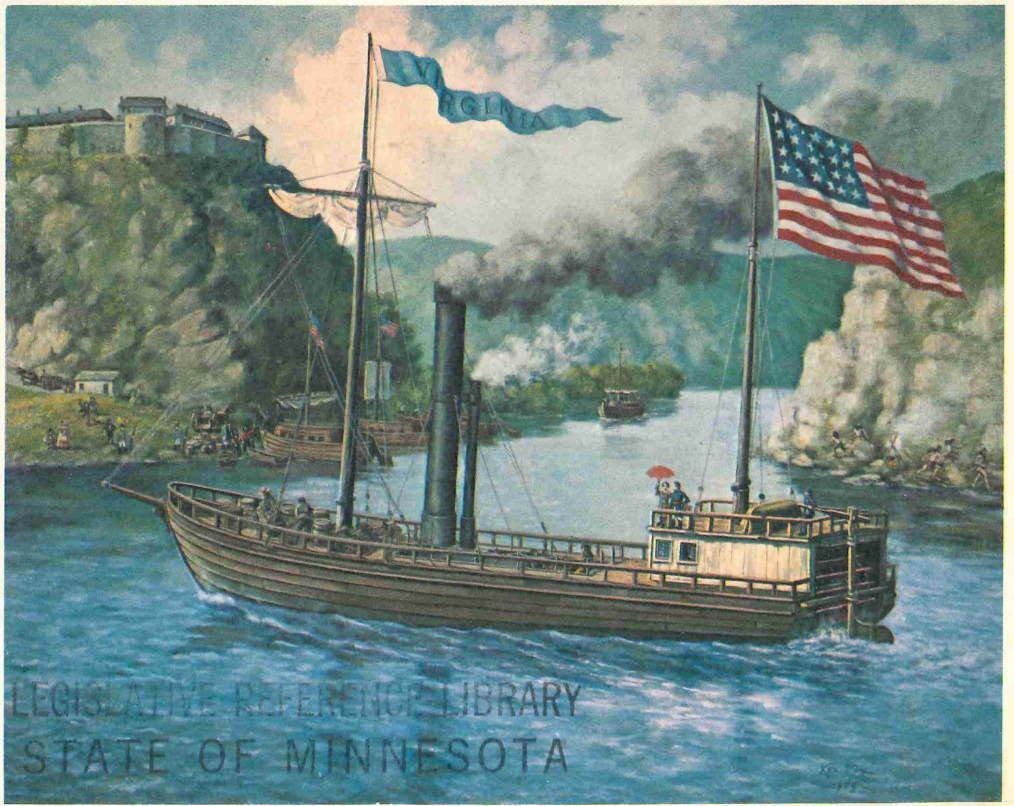
The Golden Age of the "Fashionable Tour" on the Upper Mississippi

by MARX SWANHOLM and SUSAN ZEIK

IN JUNE, 1852, Mrs. Elizabeth Ellet, a prolific writer of poetry, history, and travel books and a controversial figure in the literary life of New York City, decided to make a trip to "Detroit and Milwaukie, to be extended farther if agreeable company should be found." Evidently she made some pleasant acquaintances, for when the Mississippi steamboat "Ben Campbell" landed at St. Paul on July 30, Mrs. Ellet was one of the many tourists on board. A crowd of idlers and Indians watched from the bluff above the landing as elegant ladies, dressed in a style Mrs. Ellet found more appropriate "to a ball-room, than the accidents of a journey," were helped into "carriages as luxurious as New-York affords." New hotels which promised to "spare no pains and no expense to suit the wishes and convenience of travellers" were only a short distance away, and Mrs. Ellet was able to find "excellent quarters" in the Rice House in St. Paul. A few hours later she was out seeing the sights which had drawn her so far from her home in the East.

For close to twenty years before Mrs. Ellet's visit, eastern tourists had been making what was called the "Fashionable Tour" of the Upper Mississippi. As early as 1835, the Fort Snelling surgeon, Nathan S. Jarvis, wrote in a letter to his brother that "The number of visitors here are constantly increasing. I should not be surpris'd that in a few years this place will become as great resort as Niagara. The number of visitors already this season is between 1 & 200."

Dr. Jarvis was in a good position to gauge tourist activity, for in those days before the establishment of St. Paul and St. Anthony, travelers depended almost exclusively on the hospitality of the fort. Surrounded by unsettled wilderness, Fort Snelling was the simple sum of white civilization in the area, the only tangible evidence that



GIACOMO CONSTANTINO BELTRAMI, Minnesota's first tourist, arriving at Fort Snelling aboard the "Virginia" in 1823. The red umbrella and the equally colorful Italian wrote one of the most comically absurd chapters in Minnesota history. Deserted by his guides, waist-deep in water, pulling his canoe because he could not learn to paddle, the red umbrella stuck upright in the boat in a vain attempt to keep his luggage dry, Beltrami blundered through the waterways of northern Minnesota. The Indians thought him crazy, but Beltrami was sure that he was discovering the source of the Mississippi. Later surveys proved him to be mistaken, yet the gentleman discoverer left his mark upon the state. A county in northern Minnesota bears his name. Painting by Ken Fox, from the collection of Captain William D. Bowell.

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United States authority had penetrated the land of the Chippewa and Dakota. The circumstances of the frontier made the fort a natural haven for those travelers bold enough to ascend the Upper Mississippi. At the fort visitors could get food, lodging, and the undivided attention of men eager for relief from the isolation and monotony of life at a frontier outpost.

Since 1823, when the "Virginia," carrying army supplies and an outlandish Italian adventurer named Giacomo Constantino Beltrami, made the first trip by a steamboat to Fort Snelling, the fort had been opening its gates to tourists. Beltrami, one of the most bizarre figures ever to enter the American wilderness and certainly the first man to bring a red umbrella to Minnesota, found the hospitality of Colonel Josiah Snelling and Major Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian agent, so agreeable that he stayed at the fort for two months. During his stay he passed the time helping Mrs. Snelling with her French, collecting Indian curiosities, and penning dramatic accounts of his quixotic adventures for the Italian nobility. Ready at last to continue his travels north in a romantic quest for the source of the Mississippi, he presented the Snellings and Taliaferro with gifts in gratitude "for the civilities they had lavished upon me."

WHEN particularly distinguished visitors came to the fort, the officers and men did their best to welcome them in the grand military tradition. The arrival in 1837 of Mrs. Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, the aged widow of Alexander Hamilton, was greeted with the pomp and circumstance usually reserved for heads of state. "A carpet had been spread," wrote Mrs. Hamilton's traveling companion, "an armchair [was] ready to receive her, the troops were under arms, we passed between two double rows of soldiers, and a very fine band was playing." Even those visitors who could not claim the proud name of Hamilton found the officers of the fort to be "gentlemanlike, intelligent, and hospitable" hosts.

MRS. ELIZABETH SCHUYLER HAMILTON in 1825. The primary purpose of Mrs. Hamilton's trip was to visit her son, William, who was engaged in several unsuccessful speculations on the Wisconsin frontier. However she was still, at 79, an enthusiastic traveler determined, as one acquaintance recalled, "to see all she could" of the Upper Mississippi.

GEORGE CATLIN in an 1849 painting by William H. Fisk. Between 1830 and 1836 Catlin wandered alone among the Indian tribes of the West, recording the last moments of a doomed way of life. Despite discouragement and insolvency in his later years, he continued to hope that his beloved "Indian Gallery" of paintings and collected treasures would be reassembled in a permanent home. In 1879, seven years after Catlin's death, the Smithsonian Institution acquired title to the complete collection.

One of the principal ways the officers of Fort Snelling entertained their guests was to show them the Indian life around the post. One particularly interested visitor was the painter George Catlin, who spent six years among the Indian tribes of the West, painting and recording their manners and customs. On Independence Day, 1835, several hundred Chippewa and Dakota, traditional enemies then temporarily at peace, were gathered at the fort. Major Taliaferro introduced Catlin to them as "a great *medicine-man*, who had visited, and witnessed the sports of, a vast many Indians of different tribes, and had come to see whether the Sioux and Chippeways were equal in a ball-play, etc., to their neighbors." This challenge to tribal pride, with additional inducements of pork, flour, and a twenty-one gun salute, produced not only a hotly contested game of lacrosse but a full afternoon of dancing which seemed to Catlin "peculiarly beautiful, and exciting to the feelings in the highest degree." The Indians continued to dance for several days on their own until even the

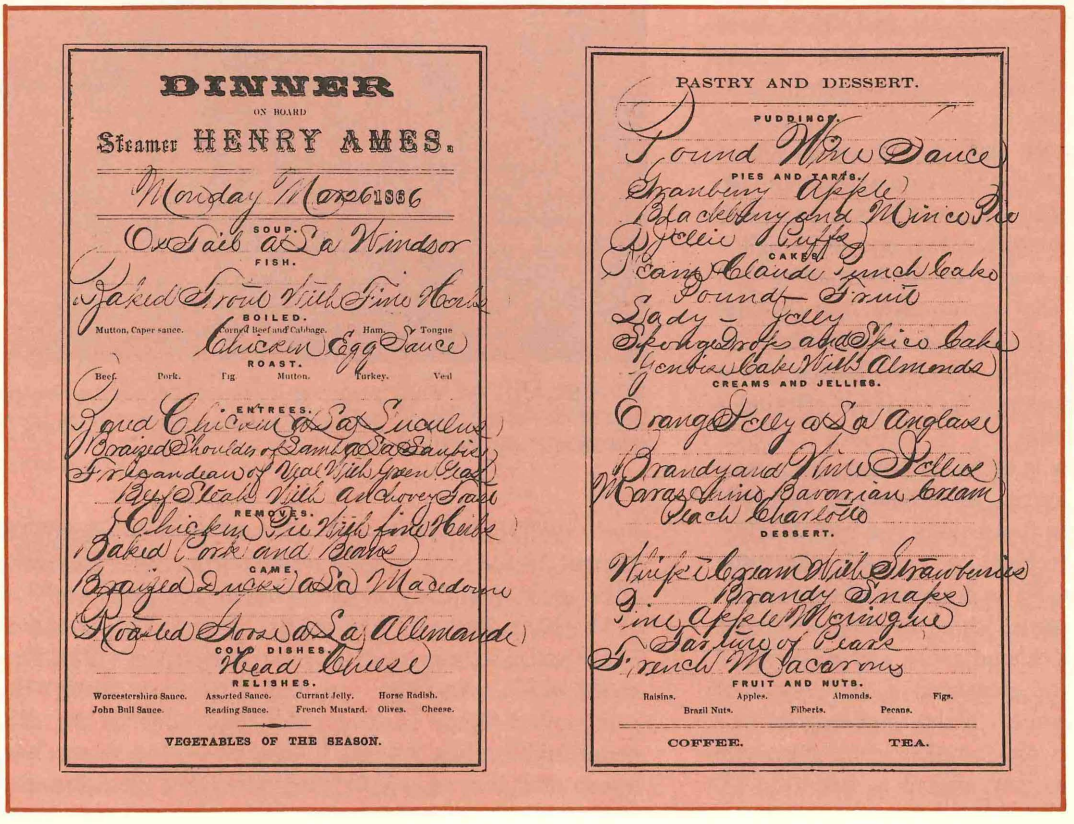
Indianlorist himself complained that "the continual sounds of drums and rattles, in time with the thrilling yells of the dance . . . had doubly ceased to be a novelty."

By the time of Mrs. Ellet's visit, Fort Snelling was no longer the hub of tourist activity. The fort's importance as the protector and peacekeeper of the area had diminished as settlement increased. Meanwhile, enterprising merchants and hotelkeepers in the new towns of St. Paul and St. Anthony were doing all in their power to accommodate, without military assistance, the tourists who were now coming by the thousands. No longer in need of food, shelter, or protection, the tourists of the 1850s came to the fort solely to dwell in its "picturesque" atmosphere.

BY this time much of the roughness had been taken out of "roughing it." The ordeal of travel had been greatly eased to the point where getting there was becoming half the fun. By 1854 one could go from New York City to the Mississippi port of Rock Island, Illinois, entirely by rail in about forty-eight hours. This eliminated the most painful part of Mrs. Ellet's journey, an eighty- or ninety-mile jolt by stagecoach from the end of the railroad to the river. "It will be a joyful era in civilization," Mrs. Ellet exclaimed, "when those heavy, lumbering, leathery horrors are banished from the traveller's knowledge!" At Rock Island, or Galena, one could connect with one of the many steamboats headed north. In another two days the traveler might be standing at the Falls of St. Anthony, appraising the scenery and swatting mosquitoes.

The steamboats that were now arriving at St. Paul at the rate of four or five a day during the summer months were lavishing comforts on their passengers unknown to earlier travelers. In the late 1830s, steamboat companies had begun to offer excursion trips to the Falls of St. Anthony designed especially for the tourist trade. Soon rival companies were competing with one another to add some new convenience, novelty, or refinement of taste that would attract travelers. Mrs. Ellet's boat, the "Ben Campbell," with its large, well-furnished staterooms and excel-

MRS. ELLET'S BOAT, the "Ben Campbell," at the Galena levee.



DINNER
ON BOARD
Steamer HENRY AMES.
Monday May 29 1866

SOUP.
Ox Tail a La Windsor

FISH.
Baked Trout With Fine Herbs

BOILED.
Mutton, Caper sauce. Corned Beef and Cabbage. Ham. Tongue
Chicken Egg Sauce

ROAST.
Beef. Pork. Pig. Mutton. Turkey. Veal

ENTREES.
Fried Chicken a La Sauce
Braized Shoulder of Lamb a la Jardiniere
Fricandeau of Veal With Green Peas
Beef Steak With Anchovy Sauce

REMOVES.
Chicken Pie With Fine Herbs
Baked Pork and Beans

GAME.
Braized Duck a La Macedoine
Roasted Goose a La Allemande

COLD DISHES.
Head Cheese

RELISHES.
Worcestershire Sauce. Assorted Sauce. Currant Jelly. Horse Radish.
John Bull Sauce. Reading Sauce. French Mustard. Olives. Cheese.

VEGETABLES OF THE SEASON.

PASTRY AND DESSERT.

PUDDINGS.
Pound Wine Sauce

PIES AND TARTS.
Granberry Apple
Blackberry Custard Mince Pie
Jelly Puffs

CAKES.
Sponge Cake Lunch Cake
Pound Fruit
Lady Jelly
Sponge Drops Rice Cake
Genoa Cake With Almonds

CREAMS AND JELLIES.
Orange Jelly a La Anglaise
Brandy and Wine Jelly
Maraschino Bavarian Cream
Peach Charlotte

DESSERT.
Whips Cream With Strawberries
Brandy Snaps
Pine Apple Meringue
Pastry of Pears
French Macaroons

FRUIT AND NUTS.
Raisins. Apples. Almonds. Figs.
Brazil Nuts. Filberts. Pecans.

COFFEE. TEA.

THIS 1866 MENU from the "Henry Ames" is typical of the elaborate fare the steamboats provided for their passengers.

lent menu, left her "at a loss to conceive how passengers could possibly be conveyed four hundred miles, lodged and fed sumptuously, and provided with attendance for four dollars each, less than one would have to pay at an ordinary hotel."

Undoubtedly, the gaudiest chapter in this history of luxurious tours was written by the Rock Island Railroad Excursion of 1854. To celebrate the completion of the track to the Mississippi, the directors of the railroad invited former president Millard Fillmore and a host of other dignitaries to make a steamboat trip from Rock Island to St. Paul. The fleet of seven steamboats, wreathed in evergreens and prairie flowers, proceeded up the Mississippi, drawing cheering crowds at every stop. The boats were lashed together to promote socializing; bands dispensed music for dancing into the night, and the passengers organized lectures, moot trials, and other amusements of their own. Meanwhile, a battery of cooks was working overtime providing elaborate meals for the guests' distinguished palates.

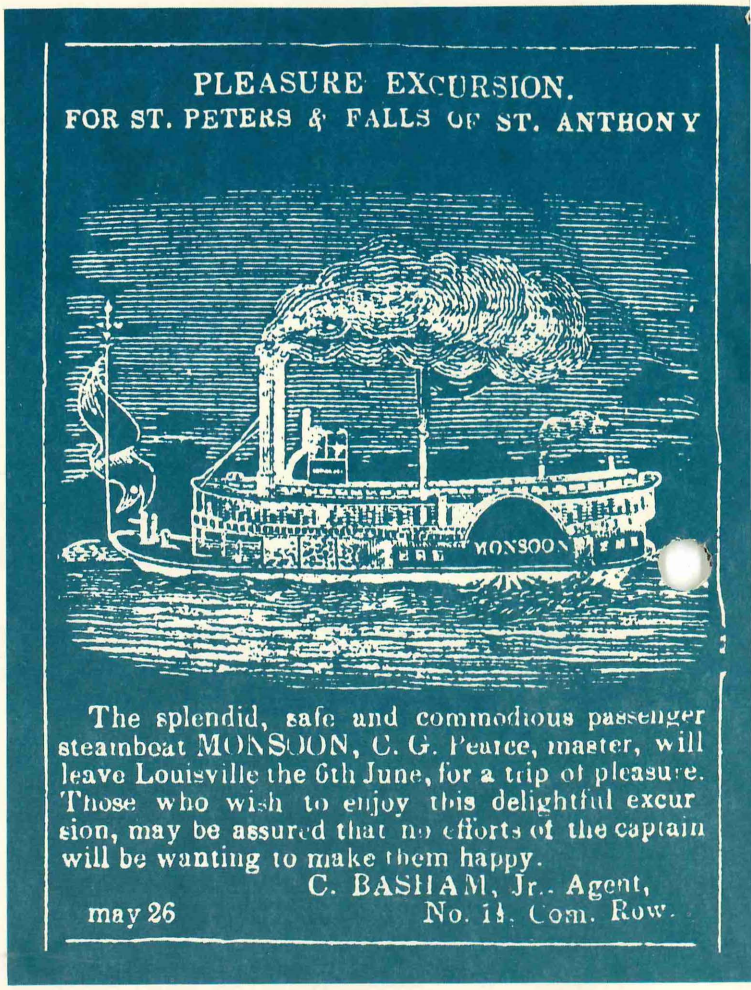
"We have had oysters and lobsters daily," wrote James F. Babcock, one of the many journalists to make the trip, "though two thousand miles from the sea. These, of course, were brought in sealed cans. Hens, turkeys, and ducks have given their last *squeak* every morning. Two cows, on the lower deck, furnish us fresh milk twice a day . . . and the dessert consists of all kinds of fruits, nuts, cakes, confection ices, and other things too numerous to mention."

On June 8, the flotilla landed at St. Paul, a sight "grand beyond precedent," according to a St. Paul newspaper. The boat's 1,200 passengers were whisked by carriage, wagon, and cart to St. Anthony Falls and other local sights and then to the Capitol, where they were received by Henry H. Sibley. By midnight they were back in their staterooms and headed home.

While the steamboats were setting new standards of luxury, local transportation to the sights in and around St. Paul and St. Anthony had also improved. For many years the most popular local conveyance was the Willoughby and Powers stagecoach line, said to be the best livery west of St. Louis. Even Mrs. Ellet pronounced the coaches "new and handsome" and the drivers "civil and obliging." Starting business in 1848, with two horses and a wagon, Willoughby and Powers was, by 1852, offering a "grand tour" of the local sights.

The first stop was the Falls of St. Anthony, the area's oldest and most famous tourist attraction. At the falls Mrs. Ellet teetered across "a foot-bridge two boards wide, shackling and uncertain" to Hennepin Island, where she could view the falls head-on. "The grandeur of the scene," she wrote, "grows on the sense, which becomes enlarged as you gaze upon it, to apprehend more and to be filled with a new conception of the greatness of the Creator of all this wondrous magnificence." Although sawmills and other marks of civilization spoiled the scene for some sightseers, and others were disappointed to find that St. Anthony was a Niagara only sixteen feet in height, most tourists seem to have agreed with Mrs. Ellet's spellbound sentiments.

From St. Anthony Falls, the "grand tour" continued by ferry across the Mississippi and then by stage over the prairie, past an occasional squatter's claim to Lakes Calhoun and Harriet. Impressed by the lakes' "purity and beauty," Mrs. Ellet learned the origin of their names, met an early settler of the area, and ate a picnic dinner provided as a part of the tour. On the far side of Lake Harriet she passed an encampment of soldiers sent from


PLEASURE EXCURSION.
FOR ST. PETERS & FALLS OF ST. ANTHONY

The splendid, safe and commodious passenger steamboat MONSOON, C. G. Pearce, master, will leave Louisville the 6th June, for a trip of pleasure. Those who wish to enjoy this delightful excursion, may be assured that no efforts of the captain will be wanting to make them happy.

C. BASHAM, Jr., Agent,
No. 14, Com. Row.

may 26

STEAMBOAT COMPANIES advertised their excursions in the newspapers of river towns. The advertisements above appeared in the Louisville *Journal* on June 4, 1840.

Fort Snelling to cut wood. If only tourists would "be content to lodge in this manner," Mrs. Ellet enthused, "how great would be the gain in health and pleasure!"

The next stop was Minnehaha Falls, which would be immortalized three years later in Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha.* Mrs. Ellet was enchanted with Minnehaha, calling it a "gem of a cascade" and "one of the most beautiful of nature's works." More cynical sightseers were not so easily impressed. "Minnehaha is the luckiest water-

fall in the world," wrote world traveler Bayard Taylor, "it has achieved more renown on a smaller capital of performance than any other I ever saw."

Only a short distance from the waterfall, Mrs. Ellet caught her first sight of Fort Snelling, "its flag gleaming in relief against the sky." From the walls, she admired the view of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, "the most magnificent panoramic display on which the eye ever rested," and commended "the neatness and order" of the fort itself. Her enthusiasm for scenery and superlatives undimmed by the long day of touring, Mrs. Ellet returned to St. Anthony, " a late though excellent dinner" at the St. Charles House, and the company of friends from Chicago.

Although many tourists like Mrs. Ellet left behind them wordy accounts of the places they visited and the sights they saw, few chose to explore the interior landscape of attitudes and uncertainties which had carried them so far west. For despite recent improvements in travel and accommodations, more than distance separated the Upper Mississippi of the 1850s from the comforts of eastern cities. The luxuries of the West were still relative at best. A "curious blending of savage and civilized life," Mrs. Ellet called St. Paul. The hotels she praised were still only rude, false-front approximations of lodgings available in the East. And even the glamorous steamboats were known to offer threats of accidents, explosions, cholera epidemics, and occasional dirty sheets along with their fine food. How then did it become "fashionable" to make such a tour?

To understand these tourists it is necessary to understand how the idea of nature came to arouse such powerful feelings and associations in the minds of many mid-nineteenth-century Americans. The sentimental love of nature expressed by Mrs. Ellet and other travelers was, at that time, a fairly recent development in American thought. Americans had not always been so sensitive to the beauties of natural landscapes. To the Puritan fathers who carved a new home out of the rocks of New England, nature was neither beautiful nor inspiring but a metaphysical foe to be conquered and bent to man's, and presumably God's, will. As late as 1810, Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, pronounced the frontier a moral wilderness fit only for those misfits and malcontents "too idle, too talkative, too passionate, too prodigal, and too shiftless to acquire either property or character" in civilized society.

By 1810, however, hatred of the West was a dying creed. The United States had already embarked on a policy of continental expansion. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and the subsequent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark survey, stimulated curiosity about the untracked lands beyond the Ohio Valley. After the War of 1812, a wave of nationalistic fervor heightened public interest in the American landscape. Triumphantly free of British political domination, America proclaimed its cultural independence as well. Writers inspired by exhortations for a national literature began to turn away from the castles of European romance to the picturesque possibilities of the American wilderness and such uniquely American types as the frontiersman. James Fenimore Cooper made Natty Bumppo, the rustic hero of his Leatherstocking series, a symbol of American individualism and self-reliance. Journalists embellished the exploits of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett into the stuff of popular legend, while the Democratic Party put a coonskin cap on the head of Andrew Jackson and elected him president. The home of traditional American virtues had moved irreversibly in the nation's mind from the establishments of the East to the frontiers of the West.

Meanwhile, writers and painters followed the nature-loving poet, William Cullen Bryant, to the forests, lakes, and mountains that lay beyond the beaten path. Breathless descriptions of natural wonders began to fill the pages of eastern magazines and newspapers, inspiring many readers to make sight-seeing trips of their own. At first these "summer jaunts," as they were often called, were confined to the more primitive sections of the East, but soon adventurous writers, and the tourists who followed in their wake, headed for places more exotically wild.

Accounts of the "native grandeur and majesty" of the Upper Mississippi began to reach the public. George Catlin gave the "Fashionable Tour" its name and first recommendation. Instead of following "the stale and profitless routine" of the traditional "Fashionable Tour," Catlin suggested that tourists make "the next 'Fashionable Tour,' " a tour of the Upper Mississippi, where "the eye is riveted in listless, tireless admiration, upon the thousand bluffs which tower in majesty above the river on either side, and alternate as the river bends, into countless fascinating forms." Four years later, in 1839, the first panorama of the upper valley was attracting large audiences in the lecture halls of the East. Continuous unfolding pictures, painted on rolls of twelve-foot canvas hundreds or even thousands of yards long, the panoramas sought to re-create the experience of a trip up the river. By 1849, four panoramas of the Upper Mississippi were touring the country.

While 400,000 people in Boston and New York came to worship the unspoiled nature depicted in John Banvard's panorama of the Mississippi, their devotion to another god — progress — ensured the landscape's rapid and irrevocable transformation. By the 1840s, America had plunged headlong on a course of industrial and urban growth that was already disturbing many citizens. On the surface the nation eagerly embraced the mixed blessings of technological progress. The typical American, a French visitor observed, "has a perfect passion for railroads; he loves them . . . as a lover loves his mistress." Often, however, paeans of praise to the machine revealed unconscious anxieties about the destructive forces of the new industrialism. A writer might praise the railroads as "the triumphs of our own age" and yet betray his fear of them

by likening locomotives to "dragons" that leap forward "like some black monster, upon its iron path, by the light of the fire and smoke which it vomits forth."

A few writers were already fully conscious of the dangers of the machine age. "We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us," wrote Henry David Thoreau

HENRY DAVID THOREAU. Although Thoreau made nature his philosophy, he was not a sightseer and seldom strayed from the streams and forests around his native Concord, Massachusetts. In 1861, however, dying of consumption and in need of a change of climate, he traveled to Minnesota with Horace Mann, Jr., the young son of the famous educator. Most of Thoreau's time in Minnesota was spent listing, often in botanical Latin, the plant specimens he found around Lakes Calhoun and Harriet. So sick that he returned home far earlier than planned, he made only the roughest notes of his experiences and never polished them into a publishable form. Less than a year later he was dead.

from his hut at Walden Pond. One of the earliest critics of the dehumanizing effects of mechanization, Thoreau perceived that the townspeople of nearby Concord were leading lives of "quiet desperation." Technology had become their master, regulating their habits, dictating their goals, stifling their imaginations. The people of Concord had "become the tools of their tools," their diminished lives measured out by the monotonous beats of the town clock.

While Thoreau's diagnosis of the life-denying effects of the new industrial order was radical for its time, his prescription of "the tonic of wildness" became a popular patent remedy for many who felt the maladies of mechanization. Disturbed by growing specialization and complexity, and worried by the rapid erosion of traditional values, many Americans sought escape from social change in the unspoiled timelessness of nature. By now invested with pre-industrial conceptions of beauty, simplicity, and harmony, nature became a nostalgic symbol for all that had been sacrificed to progress.

In this system of romantic values the wilderness was all the more poignant for being doomed. Leaving her family's home in rural upstate New York, Mrs. Ellet foresaw a prosperous future for the area only to be saddened by the prospect of what that future would bring. "The lover of nature in her wildness and romance," she wrote, " . . . will dread the transformation of those wooded headlands and islands into smooth fields and county seats — inevitable as such a change must be in the progress of things."

Yet the sentimentalization of nature, expressed by Mrs. Ellet, was a luxury made possible only by technology's liberation of the business and professional classes from daily struggle with the environment. Those who settled a wild area were still more likely to measure its attractions in board feet and tillable acres. On her visit to Minnesota, Mrs. Ellet was astounded by the story of an old man who had spent sixty years within ten miles of St. Anthony without ever having seen the falls simply because "his business [had] never . . . taken him in that direction."

Ironically, the typical "lover of nature" was also intimately connected with the forces that were changing the face of the American landscape. The economic prosperity brought by technological growth paid the fare west on the most dramatic creation of the industrial revolution. The trains, as they slashed through the countryside, brought farmers, entrepreneurs, and dry goods merchants as well as nature lovers. Anxious to view western scenery amid eastern comforts, the "Fashionable Tourists" hastened the domestication of the wilderness they had come to see. Often, they were unaware of their conflicting loyalties. Many travelers were fully capable of rhapsodizing the natural "grandeur" of St. Anthony in the same breath that they calculated its potential as a power source for manufacturing interests.

Travelers of this sort might proclaim their abiding love of nature, but their trips to the wilds were only romantic interludes or flirtations in an otherwise thriving marriage with progress. There was, in fact, much about these nature enthusiasts that was shallow and silly. While Ralph Waldo Emerson was urging Americans to seek "an original relation to the universe," American travelers were viewing nature through a mist of second-hand sentiment. Their expectations and responses were almost wholly shaped by the conventions of the travel books which were their bibles. Those who wrote accounts of their own followed the stylized tradition of that literature, filling their pages with strained allusions, poetic posturings, and pretensions to deep feeling. So attached were they to

romantic abstractions like "sublimity," "majesty," and "grandeur," that their descriptions sound emotionally bogus and superlatively the same.

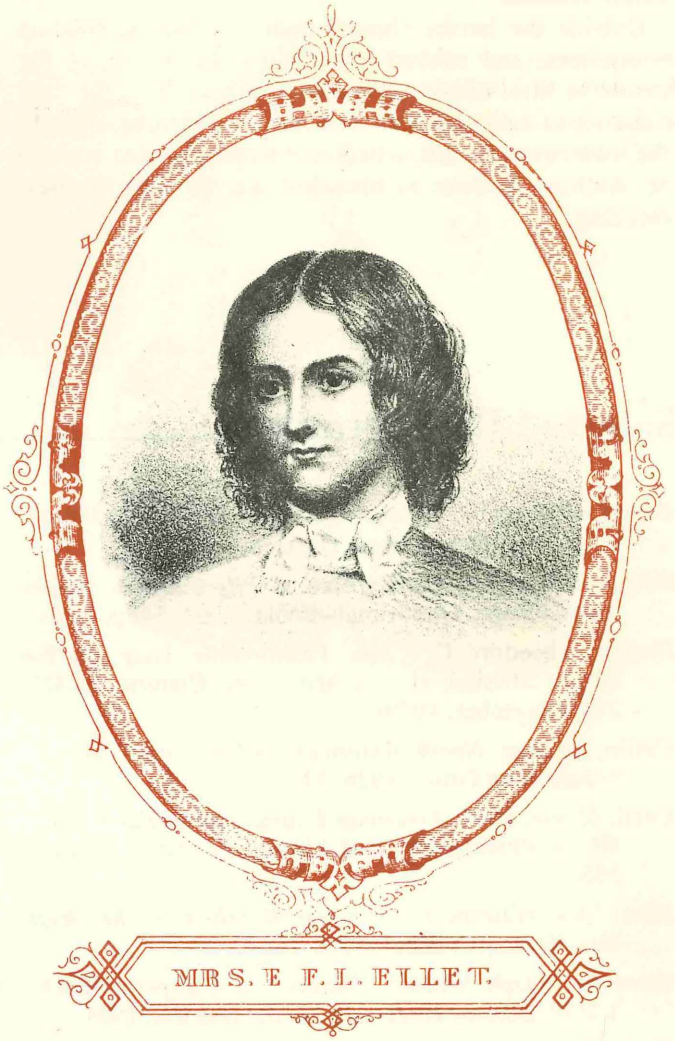
Once they had seen the sights and sighed the sentiments of conventional appreciation, often taking only the better part of a day to accomplish both, most of the "Fashionable Tourists" were ready to return to civilization and the real world. The indomitable Mrs. Ellet, however, decided to put her enthusiasm for "the romance of camping" to the test by joining an expedition to a newly discovered lake, called Minnetonka by the Indians. Although female participation in the trip "was hooted at as quite out of the question," Mrs. Ellet was undeterred. "This masculine selfishness in appropriating the first sights of fine scenery, and the honors of discovery with such overbearing exclusiveness," she bristled, "determined us on a visit to the far-famed lake."

A few days later she and several other rugged individualists left St. Anthony by wagon, taking with them "a basket of provisions supplied from the liberal larder of the St. Charles House." Leaving the road to Lake Calhoun, they followed an old Indian trail for a short distance and then made their own trail by compass through heavy underbrush over ridges so precipitous that "it seemed impossible to sustain a foothold — knowing nothing," Mrs. Ellet dramatized, ". . . of what was to come, or through what perils we should issue safely." After miles of travel through rough country, they forded a stream, climbed yet another ridge, and "ploughed . . . through a forest of undergrowth" only to come face to face with a haystack. Mrs. Ellet was predictably dismayed by so obvious a sign of common domesticity, but turned her disappointment into a good-humored, ironic burlesque of romantic expectations. "This was an unwelcome sight to a party anxious to escape from all sign or token of 'the settlements;' but we were presently consoled on being informed it was 'the hermit's hay.' Poor recluse! we might, without detriment to the most fastidious romance, allow him the privilege of cutting and drying the wild grass — to serve for a couch, perhaps, or the like; for we had ascertained, to our entire satisfaction, that he kept no stock of any kind. We should, however, have preferred seeing a man dressed in skins, or even wrapped in an Indian blanket, answer the loud call of our driver, to the sight of one robed in common farmer's fashion."

FURTHER disillusionments were close at hand. The hermit's shanty turned out to be as unromantic as its owner. An accidental-looking collection of rough boards with a bed on the floor and only the rudest furnishings, the shanty seemed to Mrs. Ellet "as unpoetical a shelter as could well be imagined." Rather than risk its shabby comforts, she and the other women chose to wait in the hot sun while the men readied the boat.

The lake itself brought a return to romance, poetry, and "emotions of wonder and admiration." They explored the eastern four in the chain of sixteen lakes, and Mrs. Ellet, "claiming the right, as the first white woman who had ever looked on its beauty," named one bay Lake Browning and another Lake Bryant in honor of the poets. At Lake Bryant they rose respectfully for the christening as Mrs. Ellet read some appropriate lines from the beloved poet.

Enthralled by Minnetonka's beauty, they returned to the hermit's landing and what Mrs. Ellet called "the less



MRS. ELIZABETH ELLET as a young woman. This lively, independent woman is best remembered as the author of *The Women of the American Revolution,* the first serious study of women's role in the nation's early history. In her travels through the West she collected many stories of the courage and heroism of frontier women. After telling the story of Mary Spears, who survived Indian capture as a young girl to lead a long and useful life, Mrs. Ellet urged that "we contemplate the character of those heroic matrons . . . whose influence was so controlling and extensive, though unacknowledged in history, which deals only with the actions of men." Photo courtesy New York Public Library.

agreeable part of the romance of camping out." The evening started well enough. Fishermen's creels and the St. Charles picnic basket provided a substantial dinner, but then came the mosquitoes and "repentance for our want of thought in not bringing tents." The men tried to sleep in the open air with buffalo robes their only protection from the insects. The women were allowed the shelter

of the "unpoetic" shanty where they suffered from a number of additional irritants. "The heat, and the fumes of cookery; the gambols of a number of field mice which had got in through the crevices, and were feasting on the remnants of our repast, with the fear that the little creatures might next pay us a visit, were sufficient to banish slumber."

Outside the horses chewed their hay loudly, swished mosquitoes, and rubbed and kicked the boards of the shanty to Mrs. Ellet's exasperation. Their thirst for "the romance of camping out" satisfied by one long night in the wilderness, the dispirited adventurers headed back to St. Anthony as soon as breakfast was finished the next morning.

After a short trip up the St. Croix River by steamboat, Mrs. Ellet returned to New York City, where she prepared her *Summer Rambles in the West* for publication. "It was with much regret," she wrote, "we bade farewell, for the present, to Minnesota. Pleasant will be our memories of that pleasant region."

The popularity of the "Fashionable Tour" continued throughout the 1850s. But soon the railroad swept over the Mississippi and beyond, taking tourists to new frontiers. Nature lovers continued to come to Minnesota but never in quite the same way as they had in the heyday of the "Fashionable Tour," when the sights were fresh and travel was an elegant adventure, and romance, as much as steam, powered the big excursion boats up the river.

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