

C.C. Andrews' Letters about his Trip to Minnesota and Dakota Territory, 1857

... It is about two years since I was last in Chicago; and as I have walked about its streets my casual observation confirms the universal accounts of its growth and prosperity. I have noticed some new and splendid iron and marble buildings in the course of completion ... its busy population comprises citizens from every section of the United States, and from every quarter of the globe. The number of its inhabitants is now estimated at 100,000. Everybody that can move is active. It is a city of activity ... Last year 20,000,000 bushels of grain were brought into Chicago. Five years ago there were not a hundred miles of railroad in the state of Illinois. Now there are more than two thousand. Illinois has all the elements of empire. Long may its great metropolis prosper!

Letter II

Chicago to St. Paul

Railroads to the Mississippi — Securing passage of the steamboat — The Lady Franklin — Scenery of the Mississippi — Hastings — Growth of settlements.

St. Paul, October 1856

How short a time it is since a railroad to the Mississippi was thought a wonder! And now within the state of Illinois four terminate on its banks. Of course I started on one of these roads from Chicago to get to Dunleith. I think it is called the Galena and Chicago Union Road. A good many people have supposed Galena to be situated on the Mississippi river, and indeed railroad map makers have had it so located as long as it suited their convenience — (for they have a remarkable facility in annihilating distance and in making crooked ways straight) — yet the town is some twelve miles from the great river on a narrow but navigable stream. The extent and importance of Rockford, Galena, and Dunleith cannot fail to make a strong impression on the traveller. They are towns of recent growth, and well illustrate that steam-engine sort of progress peculiar now-a-days in the west. Approaching Galena we leave the region of level prairie and enter a mineral country of naked bluffs or knolls, where are seen extensive operations in the lead mines. The trip from Chicago to Dunleith at the speed used on most other roads would be performed in six hours, but ten hours are usually occupied, for what reason I cannot imagine . . . Travelling in the cars out west is not exactly what it is between Philadelphia and New York, or New York and Boston, in this respect: that in the West more families are found in the cars, and consequently more babies and carpet bags ...

But I wish to speak about leaving the cars at Dunleith and taking the steamboats for St. Paul. There is a tremendous rush for the boats in order to secure state-rooms. Agents of different boats approach the traveller, informing him all about their line of boats, and depreciating the opposition boats. For instance, an agent, or, if you please, a runner of a boat called Lucy - not Long- made the assertion on the levee with great zeal and perfect impunity that no other boat but the said Lucy would leave for St. Paul within twenty-four hours; when it must have been known to him that another boat on the mail line would start that same evening, as was actually the fact. But the activity of the runners was needless; for each boat had more passengers than it could well accommodate. I myself went aboard the "Lady Franklin," one of the mail boats, and was accommodated with a state-room. But what a scene is

witnessed for the first two hours after the passengers begin to come aboard! The cabin is almost filled, and a dense crowd surrounds the clerk's office, just as a ticket office of a theatre is crowded on a benefit night. Of course not more than half can get state-rooms and the rest must sleep on the cabin floor. Over two hundred cabin passengers came up on the Lady Franklin. The beds which are made up on the floor are tolerably comfortable, as each boat is supplied with an extra number of single mattresses. The Lady Franklin is an old boat, and this is said to be its last season.¹ Two years ago it was one of the excursion fleet to St. Paul, and was then in its prime. But steamboats are short lived ...

Three weeks after this trip the Lady Franklin was snagged, and became a total loss.

... We were nearly four days in making the trip. The line of boats of which the Lady Franklin is one, carries the mail at fifty dollars a trip. During the boating season I believe the fare varies from seven to ten dollars to St. Paul. This season there have been two lines of boats running to Minnesota. All of them have made money fast; and next season many more boats will run. The "Northern Belle" is the best boat this season, and usually makes the trip up in two days. The advertised time is thirty hours ...

... It is quite rare to see a bluff which rises gradually enough to admit of its being a good town site. Hence it is that settlements on the banks of the river will never be very numerous. Nature has here interposed against the civilization which adorns the lower Mississippi. It appears to me that all the available points for town sites on the river are taken up as far as the bluffs extend ...

But there are several thrifty and pleasant villages in Minnesota, on the river, before reaching St. Paul ... the town of Hastings ... eclipses everything but St. Paul ... The boat stopped here an hour, and I had a good opportunity to look about the place. The town appears to have considerable trade with the back country ... A little way into the interior of the town I saw men at work on a stone church; and approaching the spot, I determined to make some inquiries of a boy who was briskly planning boards. First, I asked how much the church was going to cost? About \$3000, he replied.

"Are there other churches in the place?"

"Yes, up there, where they are building."

"What denomination is that?"

"I don't know," he responded. "I only came into the place yesterday."

I thought he was doing well to begin to build churches so soon after his arrival ...

The great panorama which time pains is but a species of dissolving views. It is but as yesterday the present sites of towns and cities on the shores just referred to showed only the rude huts of Indian tribes. To-day, the only vestige left there of the Indian are his burying grounds. Hereafter the rudeness of pioneer life shall be exchanged for a more genial civilization, and the present, then the past, will be looked back to as trivial by men still yearning for the future.

Letter III

City of St. Paul

Fuller House, St. Paul, October, 1856

The circumstance of finding a good spring of water first led to the settlement of Boston. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that a similar advantage induced the first settler of St. Paul to locate here; for I do not suppose its pioneers for a long while dreamed of its becoming a place even of its present importance ... when the speculator came he saw that it was at the head of navigation of what he thought was the Upper Mississippi, but which in reality is only the Middle Mississippi. Then the stores were put up, small and rude, and trade began to increase with settlers and hunters of fur ... I believe this city numbers at present about 10,000 population. It is destined to increase for a few years still more rapidly than it has heretofore ...

I have had an agreeable stroll down up on the bluff, south-east from the city, and near the elegant mansion of Mr. Dayton. The first engraving of St. Paul was made from a view taken at that point. As I stood looking at the city, I recalled the picture in Mr. Bond's work, and contrasted its present with the appearance it had three or four years ago. What a change! Three or four steamers were lying at the levee; steam and smoke were shooting forth from the chimneys of numerous manufactories; a ferry was plying the Mississippi, transporting teams and people; church steeples and domes and great warehouses stood in places which were vacant as if but yesterday; busy streets had been built and peopled; rows of splendid dwellings and villas, adorned with delightful terraces and gardens, had been erected ... The whole scene revealed the glorious image of that ever advancing civilization which springs from well rewarded labor and general intelligence ...

... It is estimated that 28,000 people have visited and left St. Paul during the present season. During July and August the travel diminishes, but as soon as autumn sets in it comes on again in daily floods. It is really a novel and interesting state of things one finds on his arrival at the hotel. There are so many people from so many different places!

... I find people who have come from all sections of the country — from the east and the west, and from the south — not adventures merely, but men of substance and means, who seek a healthier climate and a pleasant home ...

The suspension bridge which connects Minneapolis with St. Anthony is familiar to all. It is a fit type of the enterprise of the people. I forget the exact sum I paid as toll when I walked across the bridge — perhaps it was a dime; at any rate I was struck with the answer given by the young man who took the toll, in reply to my inquiry as I returned, if my coming back wasn't included in the toll paid going over? "No," said he, in a very good-natured way, "we don't know anything about coming back; it's all go ahead in this country."

Letter V

St. Paul to Crow Wing in Two Days ...

Crow Wing, October, 1856

Here I am, after two days drive in a stage, at the town of Crow Wing, one hundred and thirty miles, a little west of north, from St. Paul ...

Between St. Paul and this place is a tri-weekly line of stages. The coaches are of Concord manufacture, spacious and comfortable; and the entire equipage is well adapted to the convenience of travelers ... I left Fuller House in the stage at about five in the morning. There were only a convenient number of passengers till we arrived at St. Anthony, where we breakfasted; but then our load was more than doubled, and we drove out with nine inside and about seven outside, with any quantity of baggage. The road is very level and smooth ... it is an uncommonly superior road ...

As near as I am able to learn, the things which conduce to [Crow Wing's] availability as a business place are these — First, it is the beginning of the Upper Mississippi navigation. From this point steamboats can go from two to three hundred miles ... This of course is a great element in its future success, as the country above in the valley of the river is destined to be thickly settled, and boats will run between this point and the settlements along the river.

Letter XIV

... St. Cloud, October 1856

... Rapid growth of the North-West — Projected railroads — Territorial system of the United States — Inquiry into the cause of Western progress — Influence of just laws and institutions — Lord Bacon's remark.

St. Paul, October 1856

The progress which has characterized the settlement of the territory of Minnesota, presents to the notice of the student of history and political economy some important facts. The growth of a frontier community, so orderly, so rapid, and having so much of the conservative element in it, has rarely been instanced in the annals of the world. In less time than it takes the government to build a custom house we see an unsettled territory grown to the size of a respectable state, in wealth, in population in power ...

When we contemplate the headlong progress of Western growth in its innumerable evidences of energy, we admit the truth of what the Roman poet said — *nil mortalibus arduum est* — that there is nothing too difficult for man. In the narrative of his exploration to the Mississippi in 1820 ... Mr. Schoolcraft tells us how Chicago then appeared. "We found," says he, "four or five families living here." Four or five families was the extent of the population of Chicago in 1820! In 1836 it had 4853 inhabitants. In 1855 its population was 85,000. This history of many western towns that have sprung up within ten years is characterized by much the same sort of thrift. Unless some terrible scourge shall come to desolate the land ... a few more years will present the magnificent spectacle of the entire domain stretching from this frontier to the Pacific coast, transformed into a region of culture ...

At present there are not railroads in operation in Minnesota; but those which are already projected indicate, as well as any statistics, the progress which is taking place. The Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond-du-Lac Railroad was commenced some two years ago at Chicago and over 100 miles of it are completed ... A road has been surveyed from the head of Lake Superior via St. Paul to the southern line of the territory, and will soon be worked ... Another road is being built up the valley of the Red Cedar River in Iowa to Minneapolis. The Keokuk road is in operation over fifty miles, and will soon be under contract to St. Paul. This road is to run via the valley of the Des Moines River, through the rich coal fields of Iowa, and will supply the upper Mississippi and Lake Superior region with coal ... A railroad through this part of the country to the Pacific is among the probable events of the present generation.