

STEAMBOATING ON THE MINNESOTA RIVER

T22

1850-1911

In June of 1850, the *Anthony Wayne*, a Mississippi River sidewheeler under the command of Daniel Able, came up to St. Paul with an excursion party from St. Louis. A band had been picked up at Quincy, Illinois to entertain the party. There had been heavy rains in Minnesota and the Minnesota River was high. It was suggested to Captain Able to take his boat up this little known river to

see the countryside. A purse of \$225.00 was collected to defray the expense and the party increased to over 150 persons. On June 28, 1850, the *Anthony Wayne* ascended the Minnesota River to the rapids near Carver and returned to St. Paul without a mishap. The achievement was heralded in the newspapers far and wide.

The *Nominee*, another sidewheeler and special rival came to St. Paul at about this time and her Captain Orren declared he would show the *Anthony Wayne* a thing or two about the navigation of the Minnesota. He got up an excursion party and on July 12th ascended the Minnesota beyond the rapids and nailed a shingle on a tree three miles beyond the rapids, then turned to St. Paul in triumph.

The *Anthony Wayne* was not to be outdone. On July 18th the *Anthony Wayne*, with

a large excursion party and the Fort Snelling Band, ascended the Minnesota as far as the shingle left by the *Nominee* on the first day and spent the night at Traverse des Sioux the second day. Several people joined the party as it proceeded two or three miles beyond the present city of Mankato. It then turned around and returned to St. Paul with many stories about the beauty and the fertile lands along the river.

When Captain M.K. Harris, the owner of the *Yankee*, heard the news, he decided to surpass both of them with his small stern-wheeler. On July 22nd they arrived at Traverse des Sioux where the missionaries had harvested a small crop of wheat. As they proceeded up the river they came to the mound at the mouth of the Blue Earth River. Here they found a small trading post belonging to H.H. Sibley. On the third day the *Yankee* had reached a point a little beyond the village of Judson. They intended to proceed farther the next day but when the temperature reached 104 degrees, the huge swarms of mosquitoes caused much loss of sleep, and provisions and ice had about given out, they voted to return to St. Paul.

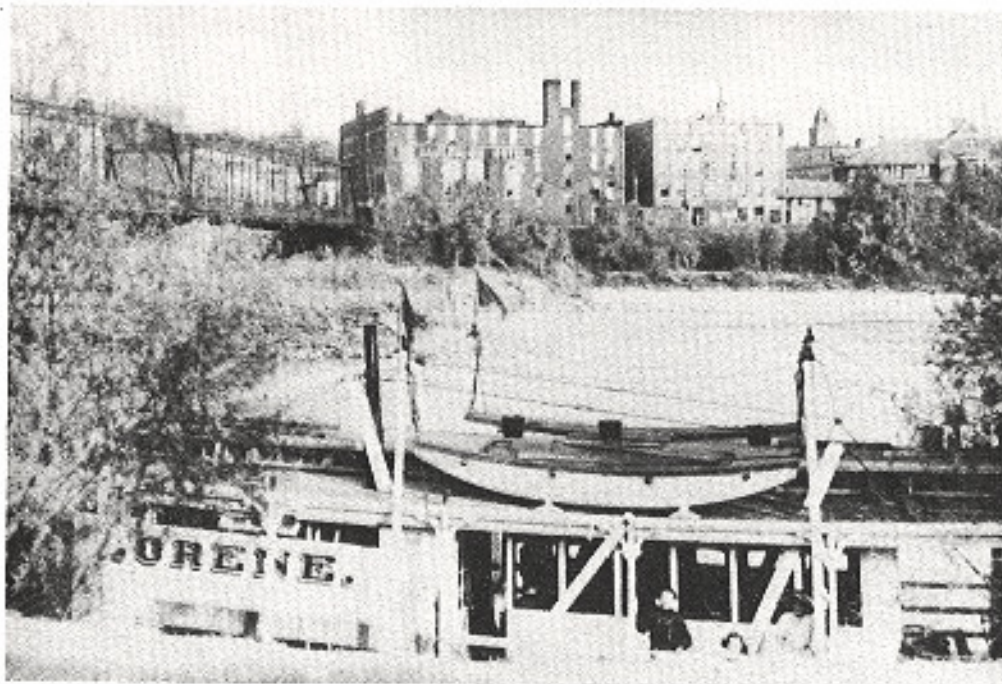
These four excursions established without a doubt that the Minnesota Valley was a wonderful place in beauty and fertility. It was very well adapted to settlement with its wide variety of timber and prairie lands. When the Minnesota River was navigable it could furnish transportation for hundreds of miles into the heart of this great country. The news concerning the Minnesota Valley was sent by word of mouth and by newspaper accounts to near and far away places. This news led to the signing of the Treaty of Traverse de Sioux in 1851.

Three steamboats ascended the river in connection with the treaty that year. The *Excelsior* arrived the last of June carrying the Commissioners and their attendants and supplies to the treaty grounds. On June 20th of that year the *Benjamin Franklin No. 1* carried a number of visitors from St. Paul to witness the signing. In October the *Uncle Toby* carried the first consignment of goods to the Indians following the treaty.

In 1852 three steamboats made seven trips to Mankato. The *Tiger* made three trips in April and May and the *Black Hawk* made three trips later in the season. The *Jenny Lind* made one trip. The three steamboats had a goodly number of passengers and a good load of freight each trip.

The first boat to ascend the Minnesota in 1853 was the *Greek Slave*, a sidewheeler. She arrived in Mankato on April 7th with 150 passengers and a large quantity of freight. In the spring of 1853 two events occurred which greatly stimulated traffic on the river. One was the establishment of two Sioux agencies on its head water and the other was the location of Fort Ridgely in the same locality. On April 26th the *West Newton* took on board two companies of U.S. troops at Fort Snelling and conveyed them to the site of the new fort. The *Tiger*, *Shenandoah* and the *Clarion*, each with barges in tow, went up the Minnesota, loaded with the baggage of the soldiers and materials and supplies for the new fort and the Indian agencies.

The river stayed high all through the summer of 1853 and 49 departures were made from St. Paul for the Minnesota. The next year was unusually dry and few trips were made by steamboat. Most of the traffic above



View of the steamboat "Lorene" in front and in the background is the old iron (Main Street) bridge (L to R), the Saulpaugh Hotel and Mankato Commercial College.



The "Lorene" with its barge, the "O.K. Dubuque" on the Minnesota River near Mankato.