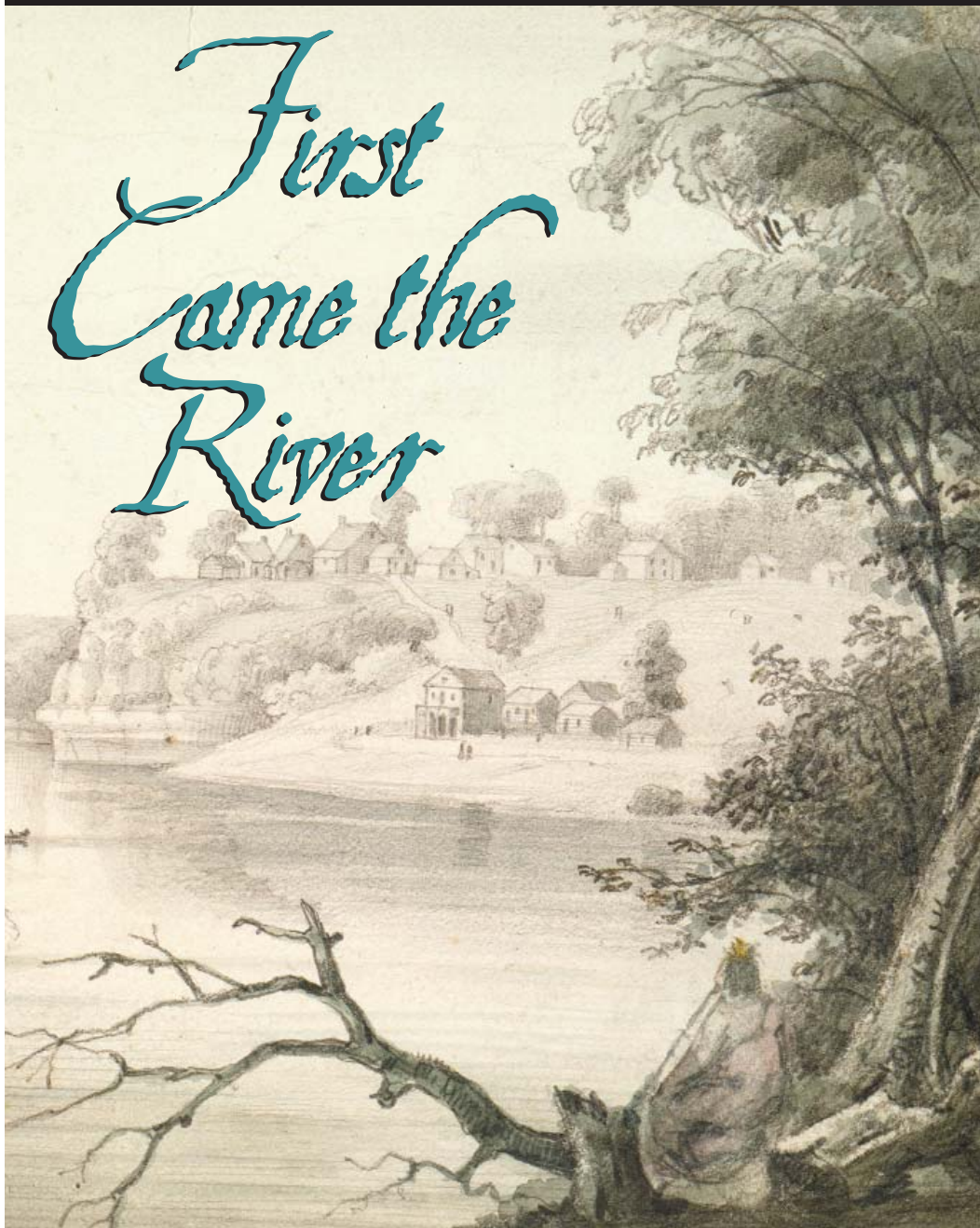


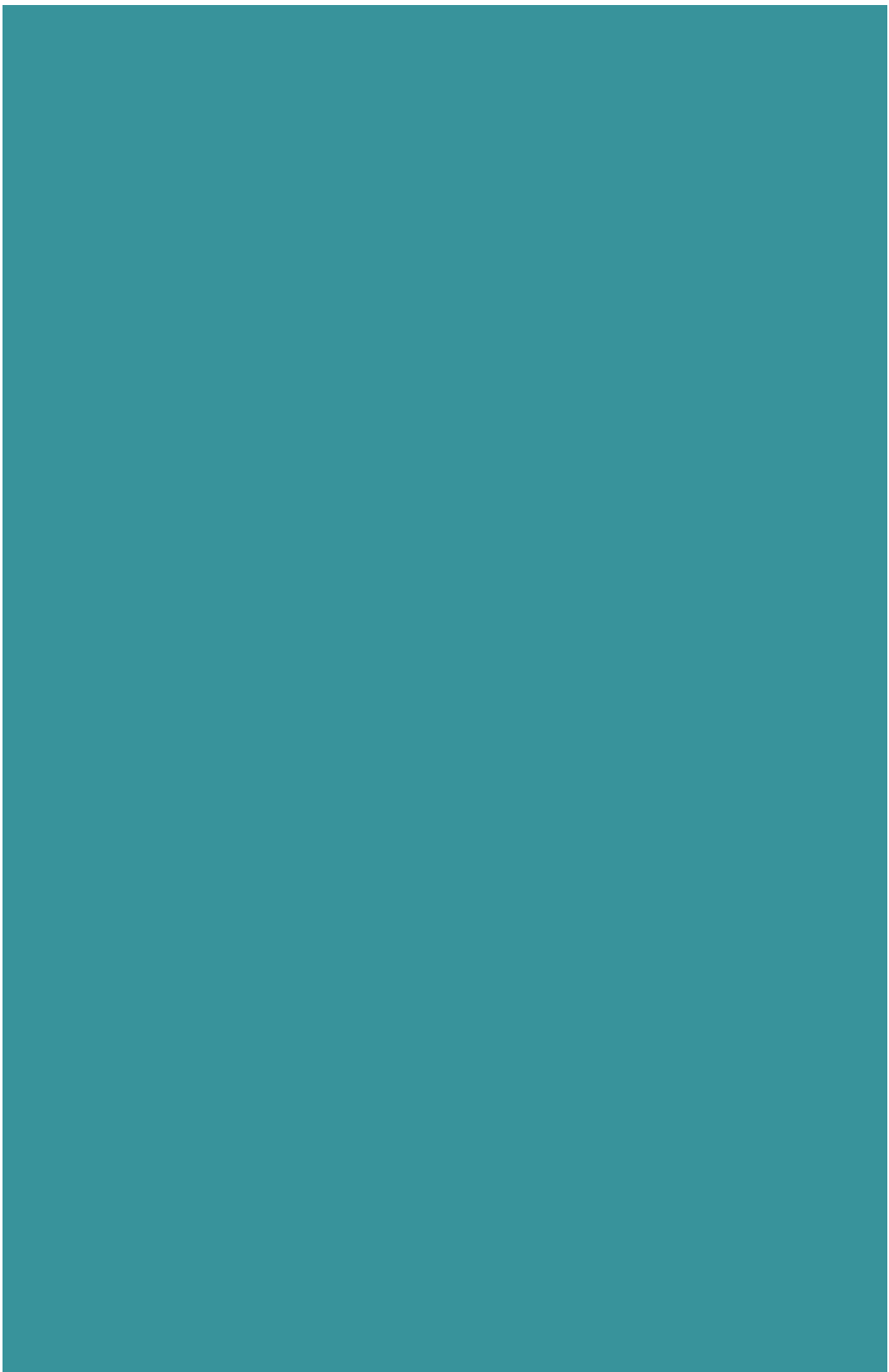
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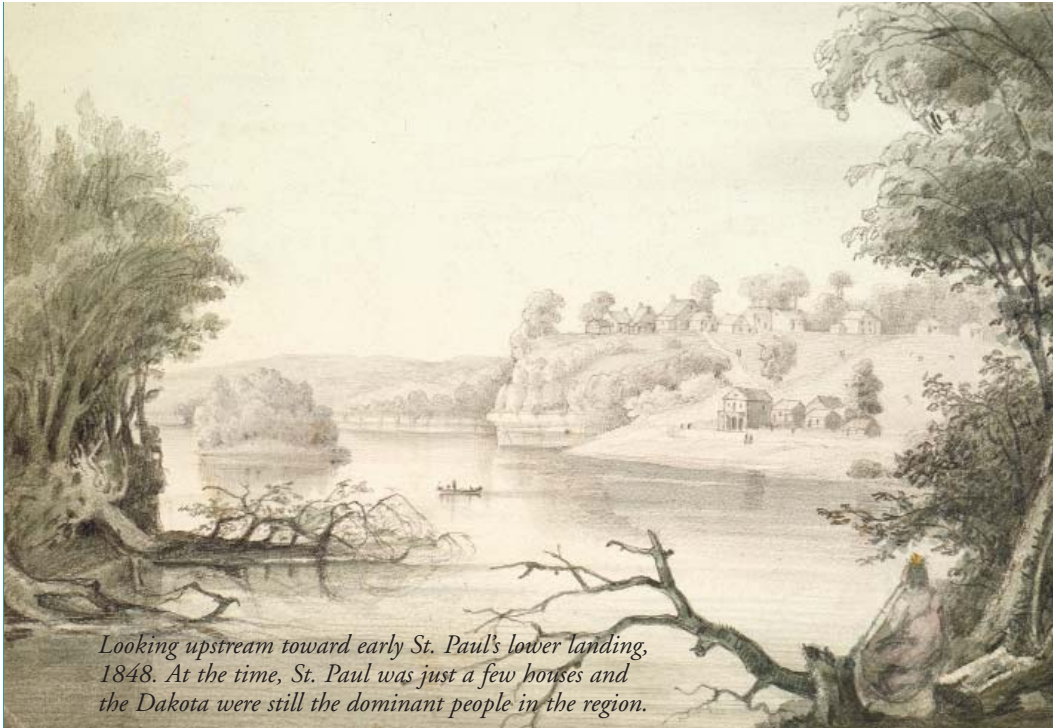


Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

First Came the River







Looking upstream toward early St. Paul's lower landing, 1848. At the time, St. Paul was just a few houses and the Dakota were still the dominant people in the region.

First Came the River

*Before country roads,
interstate highways or
railroad tracks, there
was the river.*

*Before the telephone or
Internet, churches or
synagogues, there was
the river.*

*Before grocery stores,
family farms or meat-
packing plants, there
was the river.*

INTRODUCTION TO AN UNCOMMON PLACE

The mighty Mississippi

S pilling out of a vast soupy bowl of bogs, lakes, swamps and rivers in north central Minnesota, this greatest of North American rivers begins its long journey to the Gulf of Mexico. Some 800 miles below its official source, Lake Itasca, the Mississippi enters a 72-mile reach unlike any other along its length. Although greatly altered now by human engineering, this stretch features the river's only major waterfall and its only true gorge. Along either side, hidden streams fed by small, delicate waterfalls tumble out of wooded grottos. Further downstream, wooded islands, sandy coves and back-water lakes, pools and sloughs hold a rich assortment of wildlife. These waters are home to some 155 species of fish. A few lineages, like the gar, sturgeon, and spatula-nosed paddlefish, are as old as the dinosaurs. This is the northern end of a major natural migration corridor. Some 250 bird species, among them more than 30 kinds of warblers from South and Central America, and 40 percent of North America's waterfowl breed or pass through here on their annual spring migration. There are six bald eagle breeding territories here, remnant prairies, several peregrine falcon nesting sites, major heron and egret rookeries, and 10,000 years of human history.

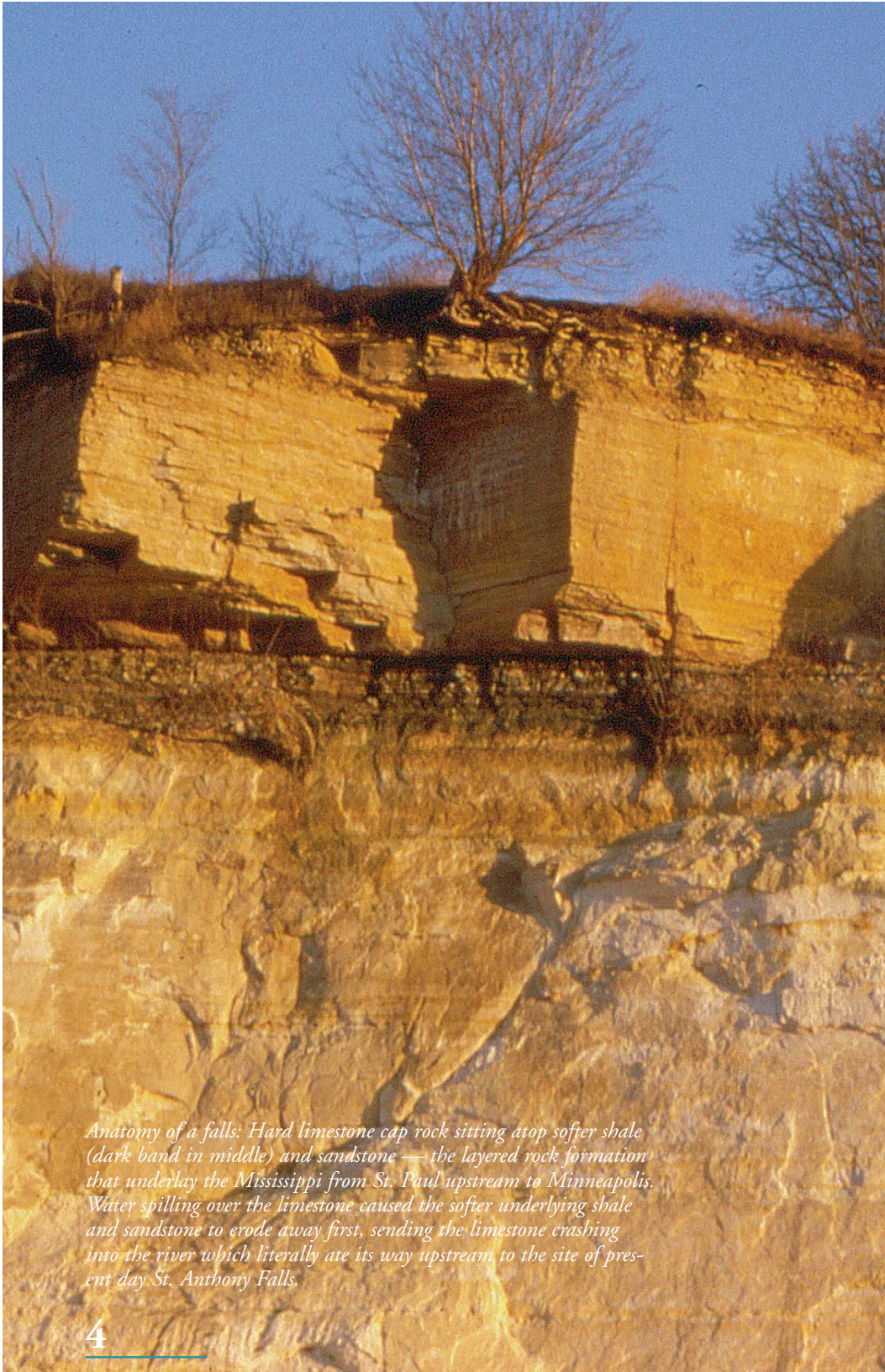
In 1854, writer Catharine Sedgwick, gazed out across this river valley and rhapsodized: "...what a beautiful solitude! I cannot describe it. I can only say to those who have not seen it, 'seeing, and seeing only, is believing'... These rocks of lime and sandstone so mock and haunt you with their resemblance to the feudal fortresses of the Old World."

The New England romantic novelist was one of some 1,200 writers, celebrities, and eastern elites — including former U.S. President Millard Fillmore — who had steamboated up from Rock Island, Illinois that year. Dubbed “The Grand Excursion,” the trip had been organized to celebrate the completion of the Rock Island Line from Chicago to Rock Island.

But Sedgwick and her fellow travelers were just the latest in a string of sightseers and adventurers that had been coming to this reach of river for over a century. In fact, the river and its valley that left Sedgwick so breathless had been a natural draw and cultural center on the landscape for thousands of years. In the century that followed her visit, this stretch of the Mississippi — located on an ecological seam between the prairies of the west, the pine forests of the north and hardwood forests of the south — became a major commercial and industrial center that literally changed the face of much of the region. Recognizing its historical importance to the nation, along with its enduring recreational and tourism value, the U.S. Congress in 1988 declared the 72-mile reach between its confluence with the Crow River in the north to the Vermillion River bottoms south of Hastings the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park System.

THE NATURAL HISTORY

To understand how this landscape became so central to so much, one must understand the creative power of moving ice. Some 12,000 years ago, foaming torrents of water pouring from melting ice fronts to the north and west, combined to carve the current river valley. The greatest of these was the glacial River Warren which flowed from Glacial Lake Agassiz, an enormous sea of meltwater that lay in south central



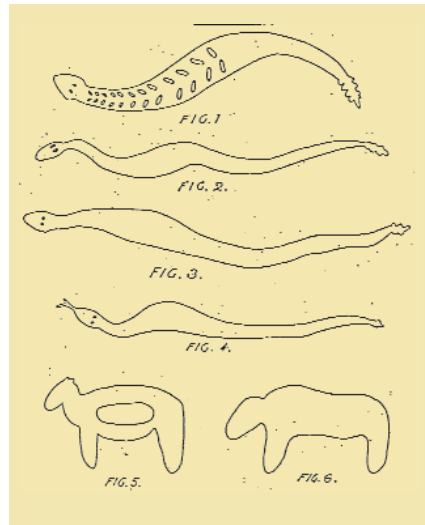
Anatomy of a falls: Hard limestone cap rock sitting atop softer shale (dark band in middle) and sandstone — the layered rock formation that underlay the Mississippi from St. Paul upstream to Minneapolis. Water spilling over the limestone caused the softer underlying shale and sandstone to erode away first, sending the limestone crashing into the river which literally ate its way upstream to the site of present day St. Anthony Falls.

Canada. Tearing through south central Minnesota, Warren carved out the broad Minnesota River Valley. Merging with the young Mississippi just above what would become St. Paul, the surging flood cut deeply into the underlying Paleozoic sandstone and limestone. At St. Paul, the combined waters thundered over a spectacular limestone drop more than a half-mile across and twice the height of today's Niagara Falls. The roar would likely have been deafening.

The falls and the river coursed through a landscape equally wild. Spruce forest and tundra stretched away on either side, a harsh, cold land occupied by wandering herds of mastodons, woolly mammoth, giant 6-foot ground sloths, saber-toothed cats, and beavers the size of small bears. Living among them were human hunters — nomadic family groups that moved with the seasons and built their lives around the game.

But over the course of millennia, as the world warmed, spruce and tundra retreated north, replaced by thick forests of pine and then of birch and aspen. The mammoths and mastodons disappeared, perhaps helped to extinction by their human hunters. As the climate continued to warm and dry out, oaks, elms and prairie openings appeared. Those early hunters, too, disappeared, replaced by a succession of other peoples who came and went, leaving behind only fragments of their cultures — spear points, pictographs, shards of pottery — and here and there on the high ground overlooking the river, burial mounds.

But just as dramatic were the changes to the river itself. The undercutting begun by icy meltwaters rapidly



Petroglyphs from Carver's Cave, a deep sandstone cavern just downstream from St. Paul. Named for the 18th century British explorer who "discovered" it, to the Mdewakanton Dakota, who were familiar with it long before Carver, it was — and is today — known as Makooce Mahedti: a sacred place.



Dakota men spear fishing on the Mississippi ca. 1846-1848. The river above St. Anthony Falls was a wide, shallow prairie stream.

began changing its character. The gigantic falls that had once stood at St. Paul eroded upstream. As the river wore away the soft underlying sandstone, great slabs of an overlying sheet of hard limestone and shale were sent crashing into the river below. The falls literally ate its way upstream leaving in its wake a boiling rapids that thundered over the broken remains of its former self. By 10,300 years ago, the falls had passed the confluence of the Minnesota River and had significantly narrowed. The river now began cutting a deep canyon with bluffs 80 to 120 feet high. By 10,000 years ago, the river's flow had greatly diminished as the glaciers melted away, but the down-cutting continued. Side streams flowing into the river now spilled over the walls of the trench, creating their own eroding waterfalls and mini-canyons perhaps best personified by today's enchanting Minnehaha Falls. By the mid-1600s, the falls had arrived at the present location of downtown Minneapolis.

THE ECOLOGICAL RIVER

The ecological landscape left by these natural forces was as complex as it was varied. Above the falls, the relatively narrow river wound its way around wooded islands and through bars of sand and gravel and rock. On either side, gently undulating scrub prairie and patches of oak forest descended to the very banks of the river. On the uplands roamed bison, bear, herds of elk, deer, and wolves. Exploring the reach above what is now the Coon Rapids Dam, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike in October 1805 reported seeing elk and deer and recorded that his men killed geese, a duck, a pheasant, a wolf, a raccoon, and two swans. But the passage was not easy. Pike wrote that his party had to fight their



Lt. Zebulon Pike



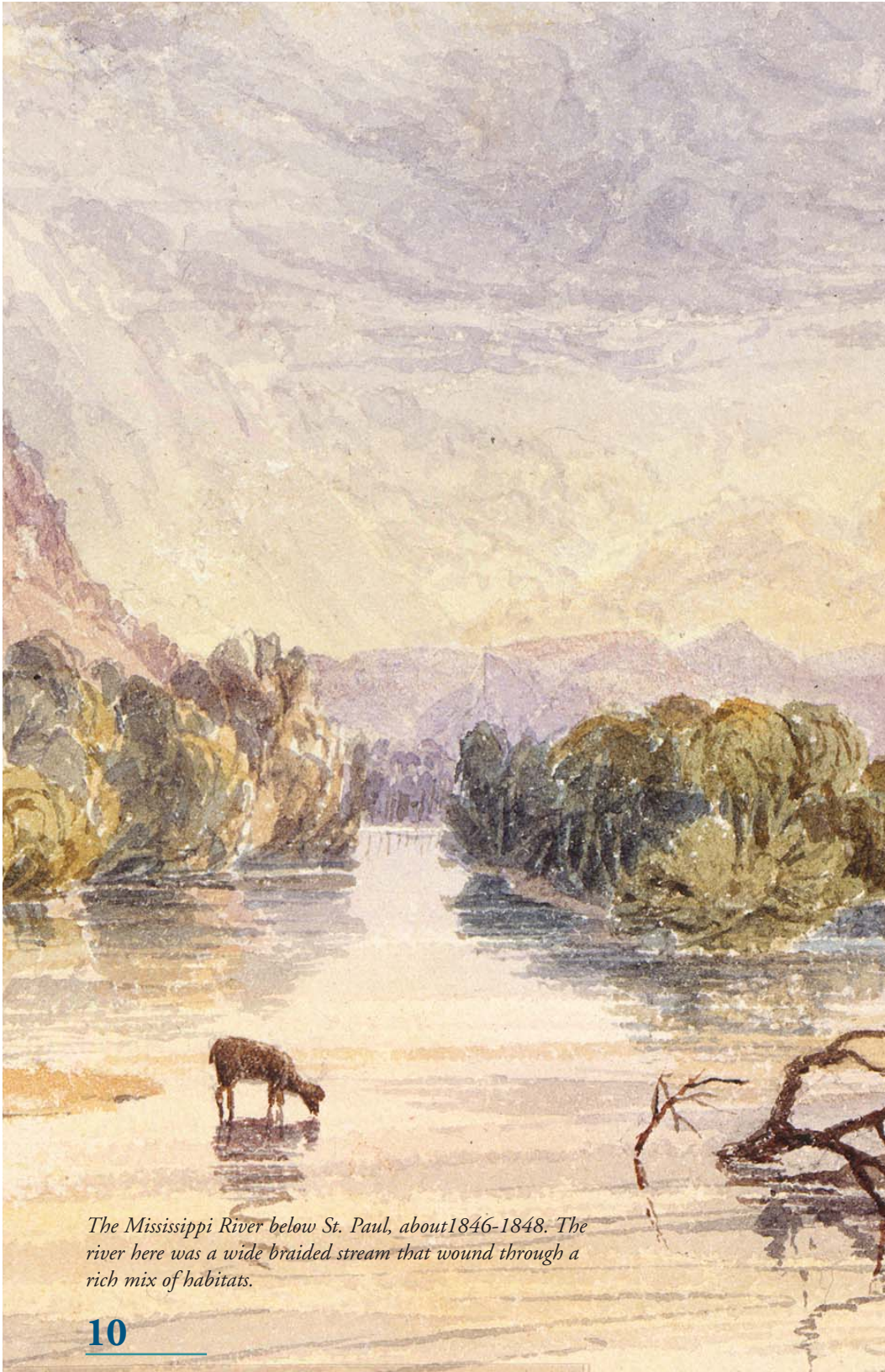
The eight and a half mile long gorge below St. Anthony Falls, ca. 1905. This is the Mississippi River's only true gorge.

way over a series of shallow rapids, and later waded through freezing cold water, dragging their boats along with them. Even after the arrival of white settlement, few steamboats ever operated on this stretch of river.

Immediately below the falls, travel was even more perilous. Here the river now dropped through a narrow, steep-walled gorge, descending more than 100 feet over eight miles. The gorge was one of the most significant ecological features of the upper river. Shattered plates of limestone and shale littered the floor of the trench, which became a foaming rapids in the spring and a shallow stream-riven boulder-bed by late summer. Within the gorge, several rocky islands — some forested — provided nesting and perching sites for eagles and ospreys that would converge in the canyon to feast on the sturgeon, bass, pike and suckers that came to the rapids to spawn, or to feast on the fish that became trapped in pools as the river dried out.

Below the gorge the river opened up, becoming a series of vast braided channels running through a broad floodplain of wooded islands, marshy sloughs, and backwater lakes. Rising up on either side were prairie-covered hills that grew ever steeper and seemingly higher as one moved south. This had been the River Warren's last act. As the amount and force of its flow had dwindled, it began to fill the valley it had carved with sediment, creating a series of floodplain terraces that stood above a maze of islands, side channels, backwaters, wide shallows

Spilling out of hidden grottos and clefts in the valley walls, several small waterfalls are found along the reach of river between St. Paul and Minneapolis, including Minnehaha Falls made legend by the poet Henry Longfellow in his epic poem "Song of Hiawatha." In 1938, the skeleton of a four-foot long giant beaver was uncovered at Hidden Falls Park. It is believed that a hanging ledge of limestone had fallen and buried the 200-pound rodent on the river's edge 10,000 years ago.



The Mississippi River below St. Paul, about 1846-1848. The river here was a wide braided stream that wound through a rich mix of habitats.

and sandbars. Early explorers negotiating this stretch of river sometimes became lost and trapped. Indeed, during low water, it was often difficult to know where the main channel was. Often it would flow along one bank, stop and then continue somewhere else downstream. The shallowest bars were only 16 inches deep, and often the backwaters dried out completely.



Capt. Stephen H. Long

It was an ecological landscape that pulsed to the seasons. Each spring, floods fed by melting snow and rains brought fresh nutrients to the lowlands filling the floodplain's sloughs and backwater lakes, and restoring aquatic habitat. With the onset of summer, as the weather warmed and dried out, evaporation and reduced tributary flows caused the river to shrink. Fish, frogs, crustaceans, and other aquatic organisms concentrated in the main channel and backwater lakes, often became stranded in the dwindling pools. Here they provided a feast for eagles, herons, mink, otter and other wildlife. Vegetation bloomed on the exposed sediments, providing habitat for still more wildlife. Autumn rains brought a second, smaller flood pulse and a resurgence of aquatic vegetation, which

On July 16, 1817, American explorer Major Stephen Long ventured up the gorge while mapping the upper Mississippi River. Six men pulled on the oars of their skiff, some poled, and they had raised their sail to employ the strong wind behind them. But the rapids outmatched them. They had to get out, attach a rope to the skiff's bow, wrap the rope around available trees and pull the vessel upriver. Even decades later, the narrow canyon, steep slope, and boulders left by the retreat of St. Anthony Falls made steamboat navigation through the gorge so risky that few pilots traveled above St. Paul.



The west bank of St. Anthony Falls, 1848-49.

attracted migrating waterfowl. With the onset of winter all was locked in ice.

THE HUMAN HISTORY

American Indians, the descendents of those earlier peoples, were well tuned to these seasonal changes and built their lives and cultures around them. The Mdewakanton and Wahpekute Dakota, Sauk, Fox, and Ho-Chunk (or Winnebago) all moved through this landscape. For them the waterfalls, shallow rapids, backwaters, islands, and quiet, clear springs were sources of spiritual importance and connection. Some places were of particular importance. To the Mdewakanton and other tribes, where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers came together was Makoce Wakan, a truly sacred place. Maintaining a personal relationship with the land and wildlife that supported them, American Indians sought less to change the river than to live within its natural cycles. To many first residents of this area (and to many today), the river was a living being and deserving of respect, honor and protection. That is another reason why the U.S. Congress declared it in 1988 to be of national significance.

From *The Dakota Friend*, 1851: “One great natural fact which perhaps ought to be recognized and recorded at the start is this, viz: That the mouth of the Minnesota river (Watpa Minisota) lies immediately over the centre of the earth and under the centre of the heavens.”

Places on the landscape were given various names by different tribes, and some places were considered particularly sacred. One such place was St. Anthony Falls which was known variously to the Dakota as “minirara” (curling water), “o-wa-mni” (whirlpool), “owahmenah” (falling water), and “haha tanka” (big waterfall). But above all it was “haha wakpa” river of the falls.

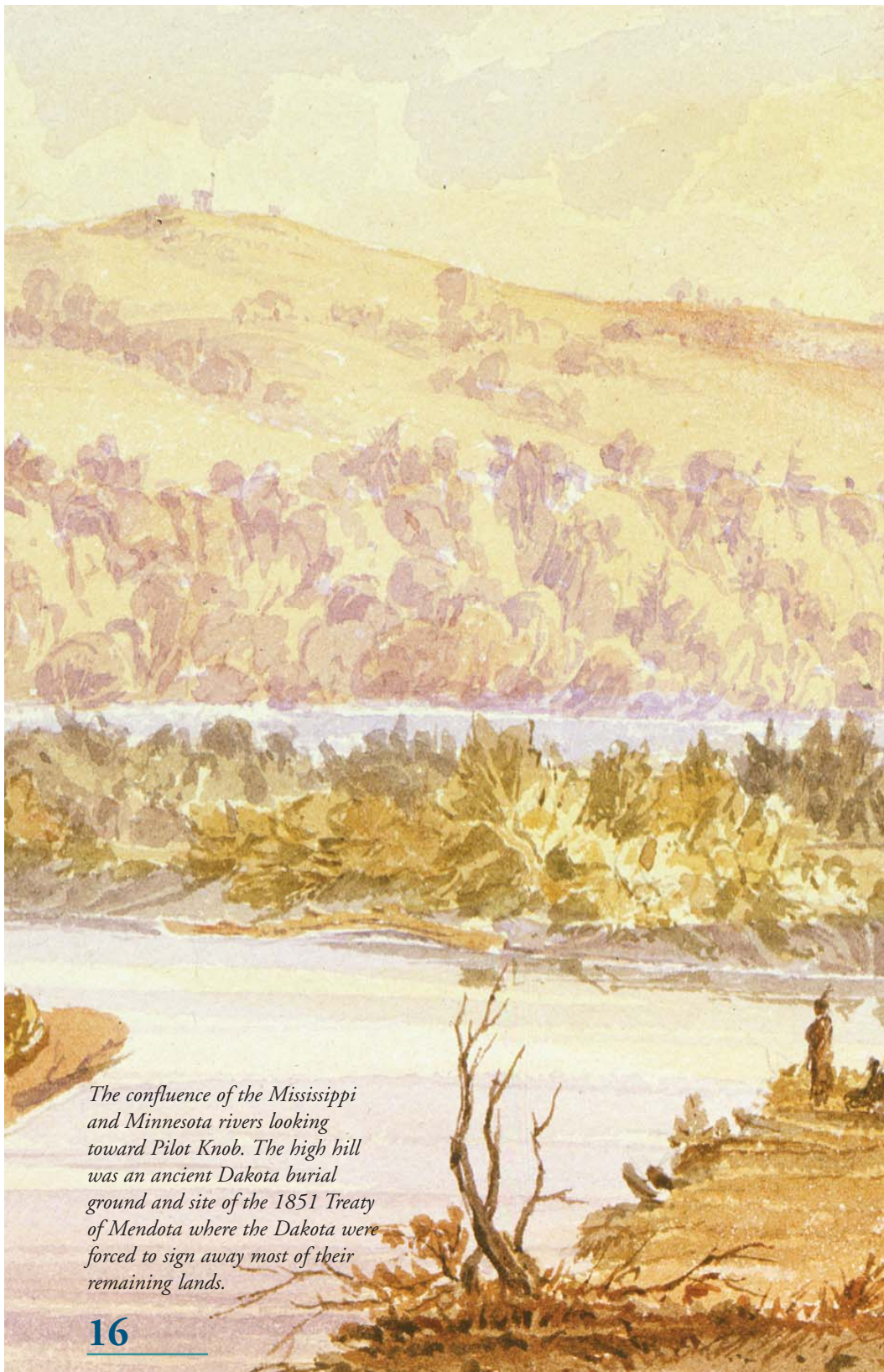


*Father Louis Hennepin and Antoine Auguelle
"discover" St. Anthony Falls in 1680. The falls
had long been a sacred place to the Dakota.*

The first Europeans to enter this section of the Mississippi and record their impressions were Father Louis Hennepin and companion Antoine Auguelle, who in 1680, traveled through what is now the Twin Cities metropolitan area with a band of Dakota. Arriving at the falls, Hennepin was moved by the way it dominated the surrounding wilderness. He promptly renamed the falls in honor of his patron saint, Anthony of Padua.

The arrival of the Frenchmen was a harbinger of great changes that were to come. The two were the first of a legion of European explorers and entrepreneurs seeking furs and trading partners for the European fur trade which had been spreading westward from the Atlantic seaboard. On their heels came both French and British traders, along with Ojibwe from Lake Superior who had become an integral part of the trade. Pushing into Minnesota from the western end of Lake Superior, the Ojibwe came into increasing conflict with the Dakota tribes — the Wahpekutes, Sissetons, Wahpetons and Mdewakantons. At the forefront of this encounter were the Spirit Lake Mdewakanton who were centered around present day Mille Lacs. Beginning sometime in the early 1700s, many Mdewakanton began moving south out of their ancestral homeland and settling along the Mississippi below the falls, in part because of the increasing conflict. Establishing semi-permanent villages at the confluences of several tributaries between St. Anthony Falls and Wabasha, by the late 1700s their number had grown to some 4,000 to 5,000. Hunting and fishing the river valleys, they also maintained fields of corn, beans and other vegetables on the river terraces. Other Mdewakanton settled along the lower Minnesota River.

Relatively speaking, the French presence on the upper Mississippi was not very long, a period spanning some

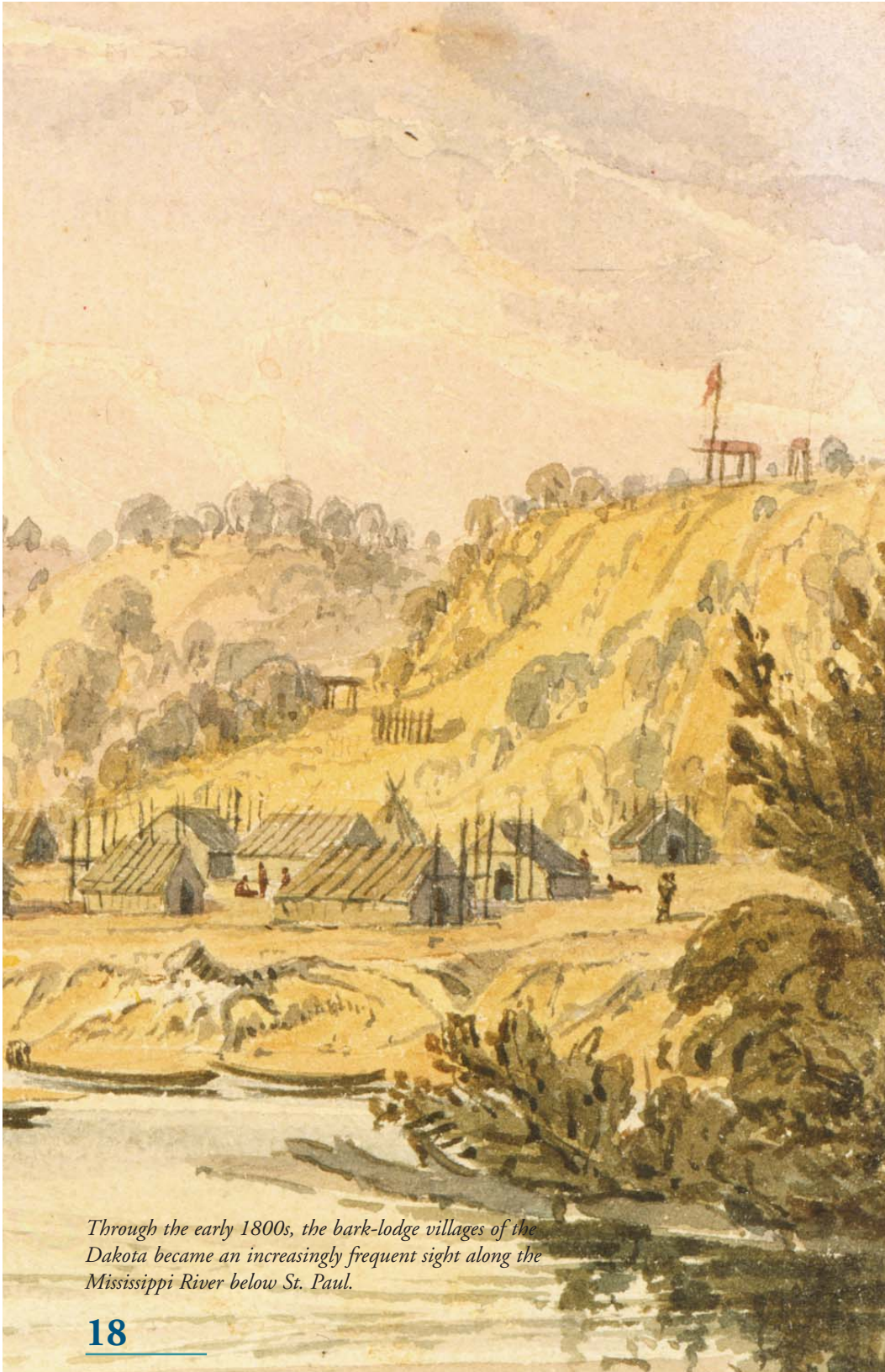


The confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers looking toward Pilot Knob. The high hill was an ancient Dakota burial ground and site of the 1851 Treaty of Mendota where the Dakota were forced to sign away most of their remaining lands.

90 years (approximately 1673 to 1763); and it was sporadic. French traders opened posts, often moving in with their Indian trading partners, marrying into the bands and bringing with them European manufactured goods. But following France's defeat at the hands of the British in 1763 — the so-called French and Indian War — nearly all French claims to land east of the Mississippi River passed to the British. The presence of British traders grew significantly as did their influence throughout the region.

Unlike the French, the British were far more organized and systematic in their business. Rather than freelancers living with their Indian partners, British traders set up a network of posts where the manufactured goods were stored and all trade conducted. The Native Americans did most of the hunting and trapping and supplied the posts with food. Each party got something it wanted, at first. But the infusion of European goods began to have an effect on the native lifestyle. As fur-bearing animals were trapped out and game became scarce, the Dakota broke into smaller groups to hunt. The need to travel farther and farther west for furs meant more time away from their families and villages along the river. Contrary to their traditions, some individuals then began practicing an American style of agriculture and living in permanent village sites.

Over the years, the Dakota-Ojibwe relationship varied from place to place. It was complex and not always hostile. Nevertheless, nearly a century later, Zebulon Pike got a first-hand look at what the consequences could be. On his 1805 exploratory trip up the Mississippi north of St. Anthony Falls he recorded the outcome of one such encounter. "Opposite the Crow river we found a bark canoe, cut to pieces with tomahawks and the paddles broken on shore; a short distance higher up, we saw five more; and continued to see the wrecks, until we found eight." he wrote. Pike's interpreter recognized the canoes as Dakota and some broken arrows as Ojibwe. On the blades of the broken paddles were etched marks signifying the number of Dakota men and women the Ojibwe had killed.

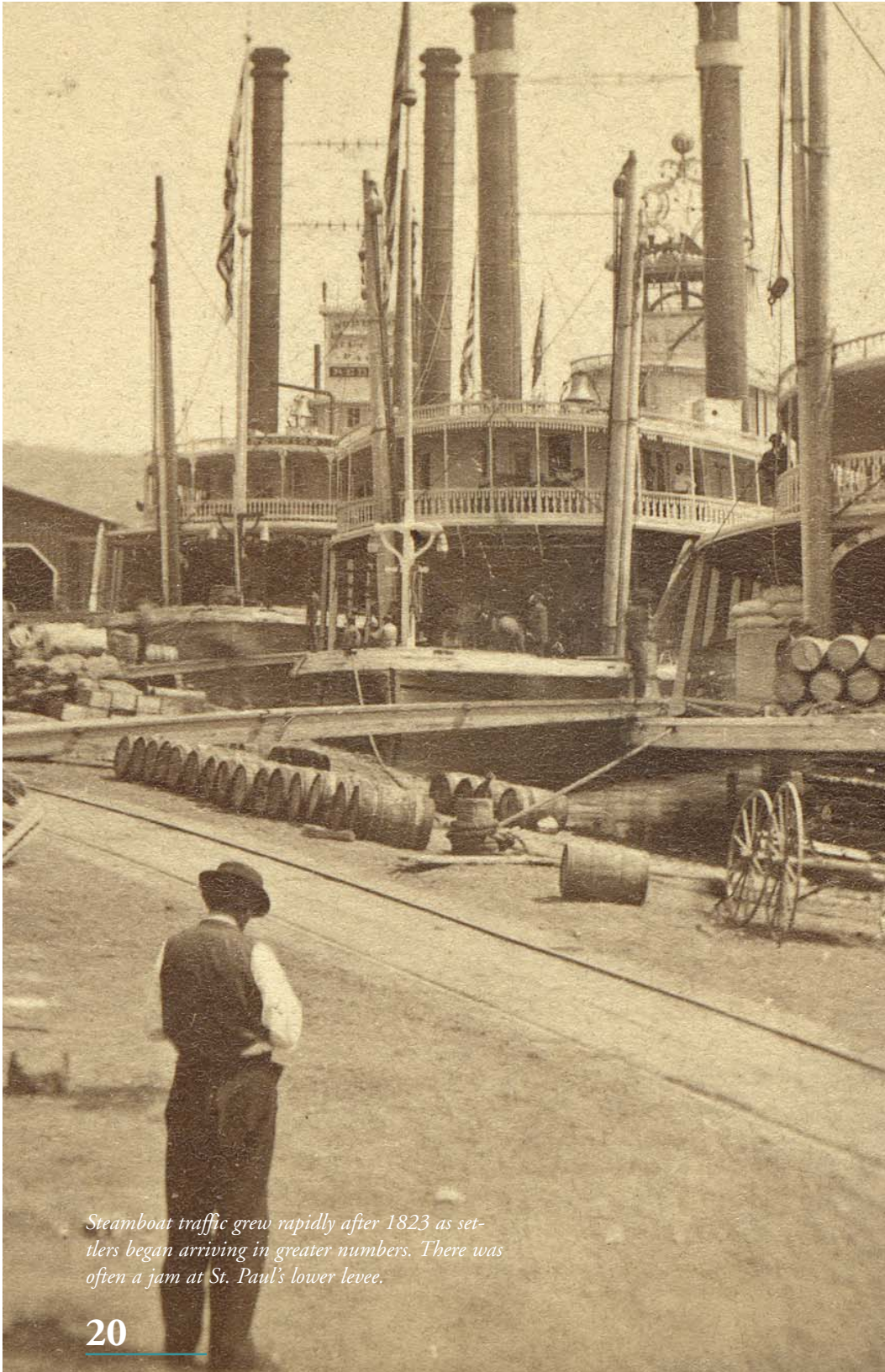


Through the early 1800s, the bark-lodge villages of the Dakota became an increasingly frequent sight along the Mississippi River below St. Paul.

With the arrival of the American military and the settlement that followed, however, the Mdewakanton's fortunes were sent reeling. Unlike the French and British before them, the Americans wanted not just the resources, but the land itself. Whether it was the pine-forested timberlands of the north, or the prairies and woodlands to the south, land was the prize. And to the Americans, the highest and best use of that land was to farm it — an enterprise that, not incidentally, required the removal of whatever was incompatible, notably forests, wild animals ... and Indians.

In the region west of Lake Superior, that process began in 1803 with the signing of the Louisiana Purchase which transferred ownership of the lands west of the Mississippi River from the French to United States (All lands east of the river had been won in the Revolutionary War). Two years later Thomas Jefferson dispatched Lt. Zebulon Pike to explore the upper river and to find and purchase from the local inhabitants land for a military post from which Americans could begin exerting effective control over the British who still dominated the region's politics and economy. On September 23 of that year Pike signed a treaty with a handful of less-than-enthusiastic Mdewakanton chiefs who sold him the lands at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers and the bluffs above. The purchase also included the upstream stretch of the Mississippi to and including the Falls of St. Anthony.

With the American victory over the British in the War of 1812, U.S. control of the region became undisputed. Fort Snelling was completed in 1821 on the high bluffs of Pike's purchase. That same year, St. Anthony Falls began to change as the soldiers built first a sawmill and then a grist mill at the falls, capturing the falling water to power the equipment. The fort soon became the regional center for intertribal gatherings and negotiations, and the Dakota, Ojibwa,



Steamboat traffic grew rapidly after 1823 as settlers began arriving in greater numbers. There was often a jam at St. Paul's lower levee.

Menominee and Ho-Chunk visited there. It also became a major destination point for adventurous tourists from around the world and for a growing number of pioneers, a harbinger of the waves of white settlement that would soon come.

In 1823, the first steamboat to brave the shifting sand and gravel bars of the upper Mississippi arrived from St. Louis to dock at Fort Snelling. The Virginia's feat was a watershed moment in the transformation of this stretch of the river and the surrounding region. It effectively opened the upper river to national commerce and the region to mass settlement. The next year the federal government authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to begin removing snags and other hazards to boat traffic. It was the beginning of a prolonged navigation project that would span more than a century and leave much of this stretch unrecognizable to those early Mdewakanton who lived along it.

In the 30 years that followed, the swarm of pioneers and sightseers who journeyed up the Mississippi River did so on a river that was still mostly natural. Many passengers disembarked at St. Paul, the official head of navigation. Some ventured through the gorge to the famous waterfall in Minneapolis, while fewer still boarded steamboats operating on the prairie river above the falls. But the steamboat traffic hurried exploration, trade and settlement, and quickened the pace of change for the Dakota.

By 1836, the Mdewakanton Dakota were finding it increasingly difficult to pursue their traditional ways. The fur trade was no longer profitable and most game animals had disappeared. Starvation, smallpox and continuous warfare had reduced the Mdewakanton population to roughly 1,400 individuals. In addition, settlement pressure was building. Although settlers numbered less than a couple of thousand, they had already begun moving in and occupying Dakota vil-



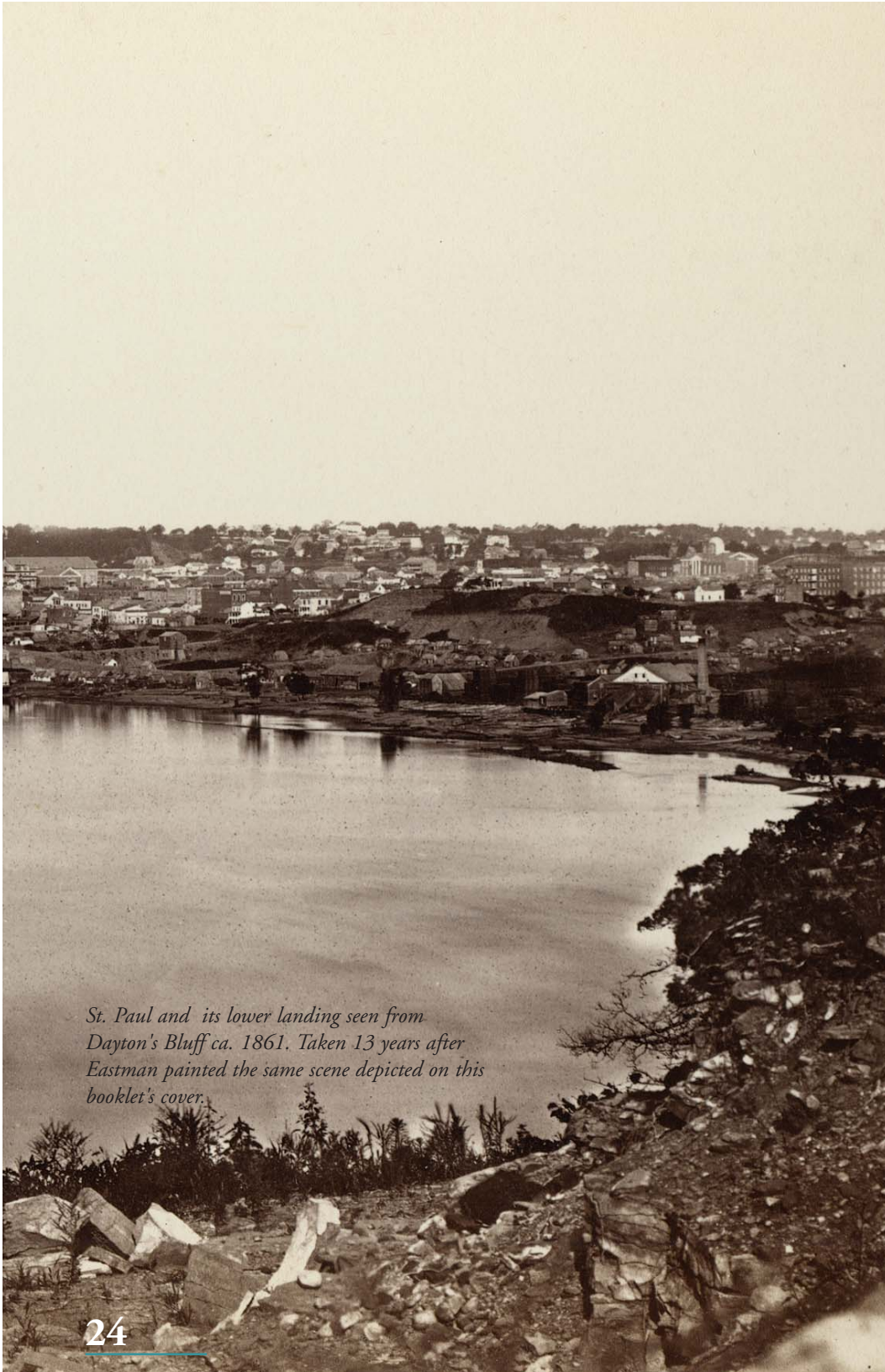
By the 1840s, white settlers were beginning to move into areas occupied by the Dakota. Settlers' frame houses began cropping up alongside Dakota lodges.

lage sites along the Mississippi's eastern shore. Farther east, lumbermen with their eye on Minnesota's white pine forests were beginning to trickle into the St. Croix River valley from the Wisconsin territory. It would not be long before they began moving into the forests north of St. Anthony.

Thinking he could stop their downward spiral, Lawrence Taliaferro, the Indian agent at Fort Snelling, suggested that the Dakota sell their lands east of the Mississippi River. Lumbermen and settlers were eager to move onto these lands and Taliaferro hoped the money and goods from the sale would help the Dakota. However, the Indians declined. In 1837 the Mdewakantons were lured to Washington D.C. ostensibly to sign a peace treaty with the Sauk and Fox with whom they were at war. But when they got there they were presented with a treaty that ceded all their lands between the Mississippi and the St. Croix. Under enormous pressure they finally agreed, and the United States senate approved the treaty in 1838.

The payments from the 1837 treaty briefly helped the Mdewakantons. With more food and smallpox vaccinations, their population began to recover. But the die was cast and over the next decade the settler population east of the river expanded at the expense of the Indians. Ignoring the fact that America had not yet acquired the land west of the Mississippi, settlers crossed over by the hundreds to squat on lands they believed the federal government would open to settlement. By 1849, when Minnesota became a territory, pressure began mounting for the Dakota to sign another treaty — one that would dwarf the earlier treaty and end their presence along the Mississippi and lower Minnesota rivers.

On July 29, 1851, the Mdewakantons and the Wahpekutes began negotiating with Minnesota Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey and a U.S.



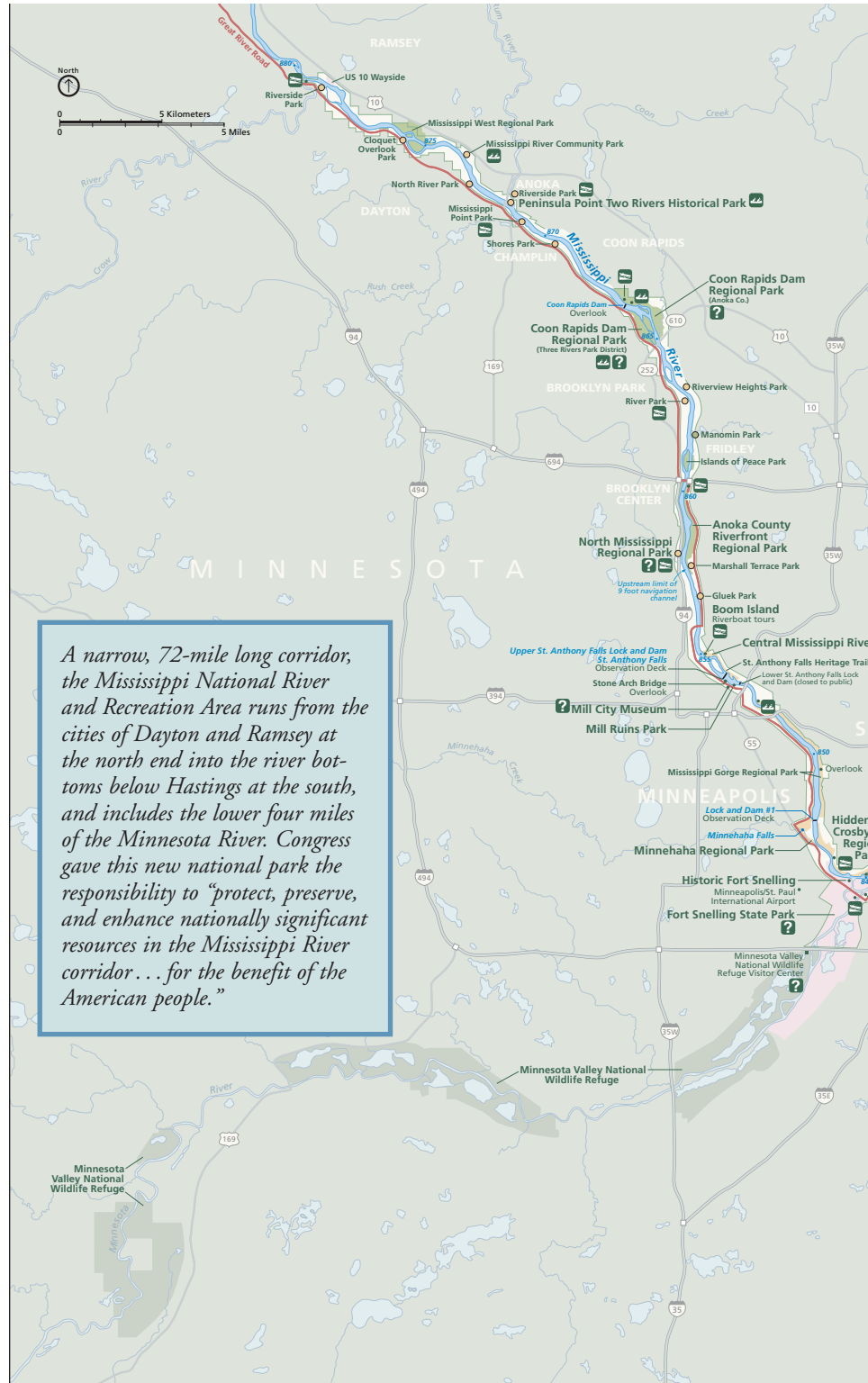
*St. Paul and its lower landing seen from
Dayton's Bluff ca. 1861. Taken 13 years after
Eastman painted the same scene depicted on this
booklet's cover.*

treaty commission, in a warehouse at Mendota. Wabasha III and the other chiefs balked. At Wabasha's request, the council moved outside to Pilot Knob, above the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, in full view of what had been so important to them for so long. On August 5, Taoyatedota (Little Crow IV) signed for the Mdewakantons. Thirty-five other Dakota headmen followed.



*Territorial Governor
Alexander Ramsey*

In May 1854, a few weeks before the arrival of The Grand Excursion, Dakota leaders led their people on an exodus up the Minnesota River to a reservation near Redwood. Their departure marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Just three short years later, in 1857, on the eve of statehood, Minnesota's non-native population had climbed to more than 150,000. The changes that the flood of newcomers would bring would alter forever the very face and nature of this upper river and region.



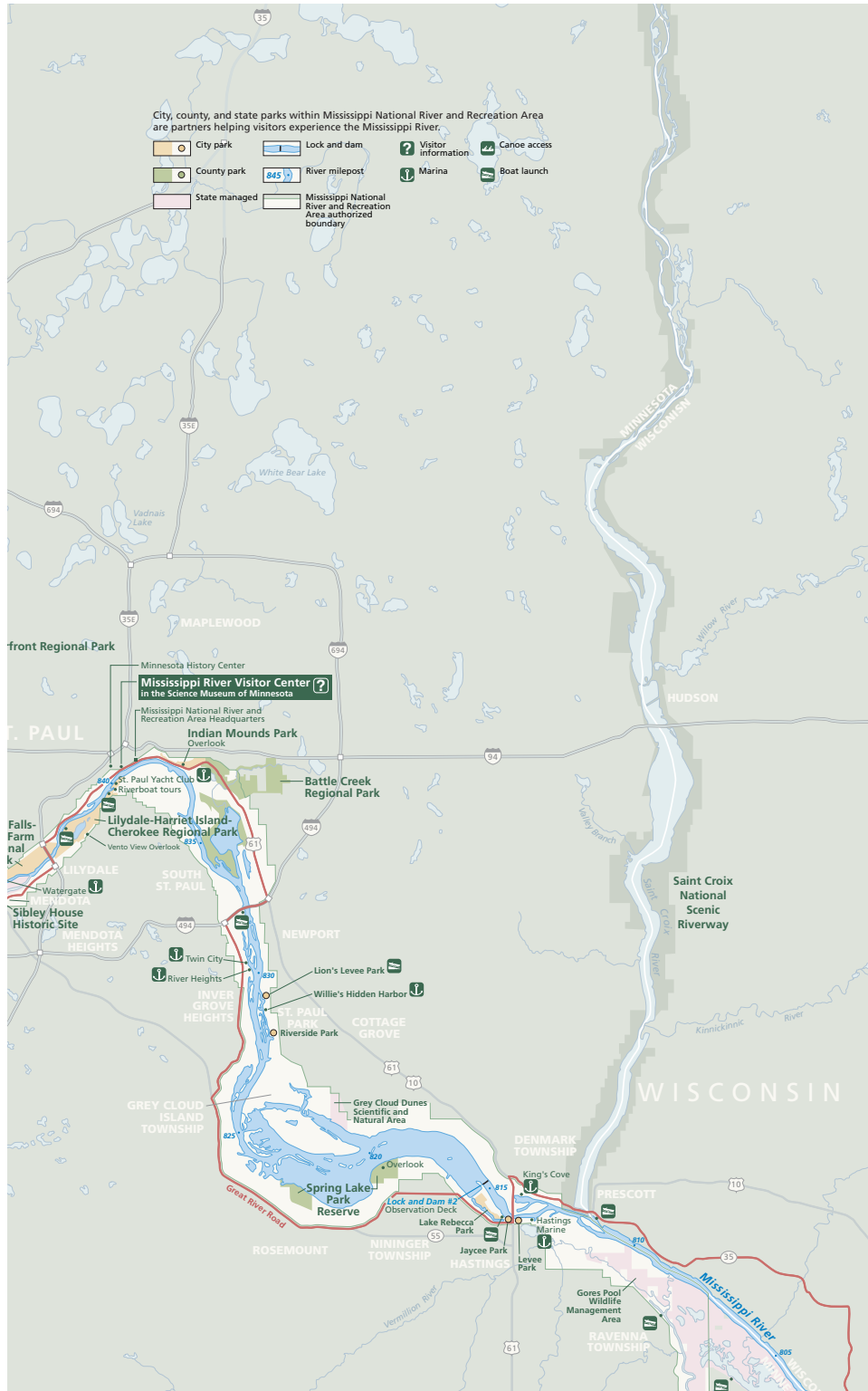


Photo Credits

Cover image, Page 1: Detail from a watercolor by Seth Eastman ca. 1848. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 4: Photo courtesy of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Page 5: Petroglyphs from Carver's Cave drawn by Theodore Lewis, the Northwest Archaeological Survey, 1898.

Page 6: Detail from a watercolor by Seth Eastman. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 7: Portrait by Charles Willson Peale. Independence National Historic Park, National Park Service.

Page 8: Hand-colored postcard of the gorge below St. Anthony Falls, 1905. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 10: Detail from a watercolor by Seth Eastman. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 11: Portrait by Charles Willson Peale. Courtesy, Independence National Historic Park, National Park Service.

Page 12: Oil painting by Henry Lewis. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 14: Lithograph by J.N. Marchand. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 16: Detail from a watercolor, ca. 1846-1848, by Seth Eastman. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

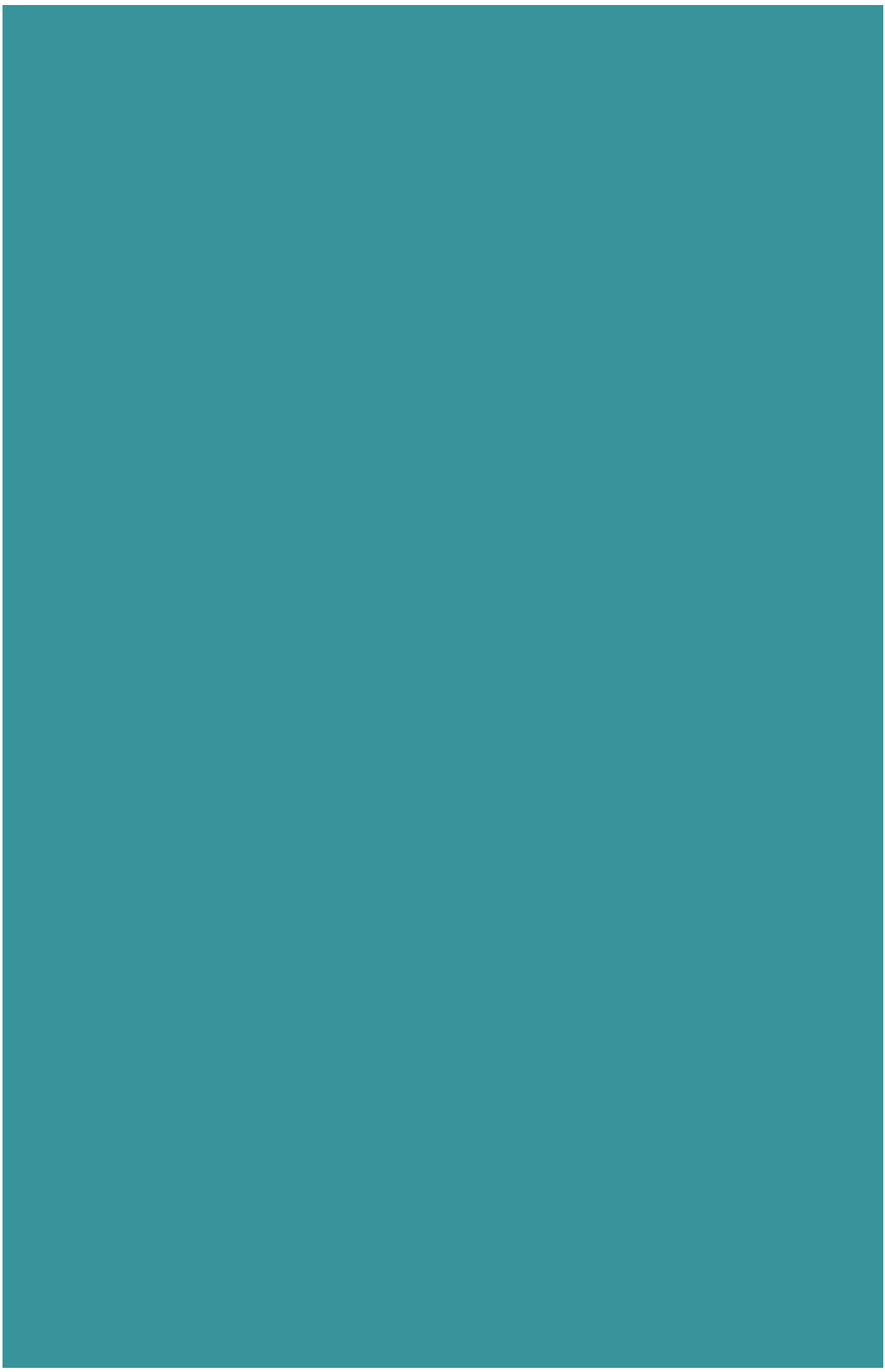
Page 18: The Dakota village of Kaposia. The village was established downstream from St. Paul after the Treaty of 1837 by Little Crow and his band. Detail from a watercolor by Seth Eastman, about 1846-1848. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 20: St. Paul Levee, ca. 1865. Photograph by Whitney & Zimmerman. Photograph Collection, Carte-de-viste ca. 12/1865. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 22: Detail from a watercolor by Seth Eastman, about 1846-1848. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 24: Photograph by Benjamin Franklin Upton ca. 1861. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.

Page 25: Photograph Collection, Daguerreotype ca. 1850. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.





Cover image: In 1848, when Seth Eastman painted this image, St. Paul was a fledgling village, and the Dakota were still the dominant people in the area. Courtesy, Minnesota Historical Society.