

CHAPTER II

SETTLEMENT AND TURBULENCE, 1855-1860

A land rush to settle an area is a process which involves the movement of people because no land flourishes without the element of labor which will make it fruitful. It follows, therefore, that we should spend some time in discussing the settlers who took the land which became St. Louis Park. Necessarily the records are sketchy and incomplete and many who made homes in this forested area have moved away, and many of those who remained left but few records of what happened in the settling process. It is almost too late to write the history of these people and it is doubtful whether an author will come along who can make a great study and novel out of their trials and troubles as O. E. Rolvaag did in Giants in the Earth, with his Norwegian, Protestant, fishermen who settled on the Dakota prairies.

We know that there were many people who emigrated to western Minneapolis township before the area was surveyed and opened to settlement. Many pre-empted the land, hoping that they later could use the Preemption Act in making clear title to it.

Among the first who made claims, and we do not know if he lived there, was a Mr. Lowell who established a 40 acre claim on the west side of Lake Calhoun in section 5. Though section 5 is not in St. Louis Park today, it was sold in October 1852 to Thomas W. Pierce who paid the original claimant \$33 for it. Pierce identified himself with the later residents of the western part of Minneapolis Township and represented them in the Territorial Legislature in 1855 and 1856. Though Pierce had paid Lowell to relinquish the claim he still had to make good his title through routine Land Office procedures. This forty acres, no doubt, cost Pierce another \$50 because only through use of the Preemption Act could one secure government land. Altogether, Pierce secured 160 acres which cost him \$220. His cabin stood where the bathhouses on the north side of Lake Calhoun are located today. In the newspaper story in the Minneapolis Journal on April 12, 1914, the aged man recalled that the area abounded in deer, beaver, wolves, and Indians when he took up his claim. He contended that Lake of the Isles and Lake Calhoun were at one time connected but that beavers had built dams and separated the two lakes at a point about where the Hastings and Dakota Railroad now crosses. The same article carried a picture of the original patent for his land which was dated May 15, 1854 and signed by Franklin Pierce, President of the United States. [Thomas] Pierce was a Pennsylvanian, having been born in Lancaster on August 23, 1823. A carpenter by trade he settled briefly in Ohio in 1846, later moving to Indiana and then came to St. Anthony in 1852 after having married in 1849. Pierce built a house, if there were not one ready there, and lived on his claim at least until 1890, and of him, John H. Stevens, the pioneer historian said, "he ... has always been a valued citizen".

Pierce had a neighbor who also must be credited with being one of the earliest to settle in the area. John Berry came to the area in April of 1851 and took a claim on the west side of Cedar Lake in section 31 and raised the first crop in this area. Though considered one of the best farmers in the area he sold his claim in 1867 and moved to the city. Berry is known to have had a son, Mark T. Berry, who in 1860 had land in the same section as his father. Mark T. Berry became a land owner in section 31 on August 13, 1855 when he bought by a warranty deed lots 1 and 2 from Daniel Stanchfield for \$500. Stanchfield had made original claim to the land which he claimed on August

13, 1855 and for which he paid \$191.50. The final patent was given April 2, 1857 and was filed April 4, 1859. It is interesting to note that Stanchfield was selling his land before he had final patent to it, though he had performed all the necessary requirements for ownership. In 1862, under the scourge of hard times, Berry let his farm go to the government for delinquent taxes but he redeemed it later and sold it, moving to California where he started life anew by [selling] fruit.

Two bachelors, Thomas and Edward Self, natives of England were residents of forty acres which later were incorporated into St. Louis Park, when the Laycocks came to the area. Scanty records indicate that they made a living by trading with the Indians who often slept on the earth floor of their cabin. Their land lay in section 7 and was owned in the name of Edward Self in 1861 when the Grand List of Taxable Property was compiled for Hennepin County. Five years later the tax records show that Edward Self sold a strip of land to the railroad but by 1886 records show that no one named Self remained, perhaps having died or removed.

Perhaps the most interesting of the early settlers were William and Mary Ann Laycock who came from England and took a preemption in 1854 in section 8. William had been born in Yorkshire on May 21, 1808, where he was a groundskeeper for an English country gentleman. His wife, Mary Ann Rye was born in Kent in 1850. About a year after they were married in November of 1848, the couple decided to emigrate to the United States. Leaving his wife in England, William set out to find out what America was like and then send for her. After being a few days at sea his ship struck another and forced to turn back for repairs but William did not notify his wife that he was spending a few days in port for fear that she would want to follow immediately or perhaps him from going. Landing in New York City he sought work which he found, digging some kind of a trench or pit. The sand caved in and William was injured so that he was partly disabled the rest of his life. His wife followed him to America and arrived in Providence in November of 1850. The couple came to St. Anthony in the fall of 1855 and lived in one of Franklin Steele's cabins during the winter. That fall and winter in which they lived in the Steele cabin, William provided part of the food necessary by hunting in the area across the river. He had brought with him from England a fine dog and gun and after crossing the Mississippi on a ferry, or on ice, used to hunt prairie chickens and quail where the Nicollet Hotel now stands. He often shot ducks on the pond which was located where the Gateway is located, and once he shot a deer to the woods near a creek, now named Bassetts Creek. The next spring in March he made claim to forty acres to the southwestern part of section 8 to what was to become St. Louis-Park, and on this claim he built a cabin. So inexpert was he that he located the cabin between two oak trees using them as corner posts. A few days later brought Mrs. Laycock to his "palace." Going out they followed an Indian trail part of the way. Some distance out Mrs. Laycock asked:

"Will, what is that scratching sound I hear?"

"Oh," he said, "that is hazel brush thee hears. Thee sees the horse has to walk in the path, and the wheels run in the brush. This road is not very good here yet."

Arriving at the cabin it was dark and a storm was coming up. Soon the rain fell and the inexpert carpenter work showed its defects - the rain leaked through the roof. Mrs. Laycock had to put up the umbrella over the bed to remain dry. Quite a debut for a young girl who had never been to an unsettled country before and knew not what to expect. Shortly afterward when a storm

brought considerable wind with it, further defects of construction showed up because the swaying of the trees lifted the corners of the house.

As an illustration of the isolation a pioneer woman often endured Mrs. Laycock told a story which will show the limits to which a pioneer would go to escape boredom. "I was lonesome for the sight of another white woman and decided to try to find a Mrs. Pierce, who, I was told, lived at Lake Calhoun. After a long walk on an Indian path, I came to a lake and saw a little house upon a hill nearby. So I knocked at the door and when a lady answered my knock, I told her my errand. 'No, I am not Mrs. Pierce', she said, 'my name is Mrs. Berry. Mrs. Pierce lives over that way, pointing to Lake Calhoun, 'this is Cedar Lake'. 'Well I it really does not make any difference,' said Mrs. Laycock, 'my name is Mrs. Laycock and I live out this way', pointing, and then she repeated her story of not having seen a white woman for weeks and that she was determined to find one. They became friends for life, it is needless to say. Mrs. Berry, Mrs. Thomas Pierce and Mrs. Laycock were the only white women living between St. Anthony Falls and Lake Minnetonka for a long time."

The Laycocks bought a second tract of forty acres adjoining the original preemption. Their daughter Emma Tyler Laycock (married Oliver Keese Earle) was the first girl born in what is now St. Louis Park, the date being January 1, 1858. The family farmed and gardened until William Laycock died on April 15, 1882, He had been a Buchanan Democrat until the Civil War when he ardently followed the Republican principles. His widow who married John Ludlum on March 5, 1884, outlived her second husband, dying March 2, 1917.

Other families, no doubt, went through some of the difficulties of the frontier as they took up land and tried to make a home. George Drew and family made a home near the banks of Minnehaha Creek on June 15, 1854. The farm was located in section 21 in the heart of what is now known as Wildwood. The tax records of 1860 show George Drew owned 170 acres. Patrick Halloran and a small Irish contingent made claims in 1852 in section 19 which was later to become part of Hopkins.

The Lake Calhoun area attracted many settlers at an early date and one might say that the first community was established around the lake. William Henry Lauderdale and his wife Mary E. made a claim in 1855 west of Lake Calhoun and north of Bass Lake. Lauderdale was born in York, New York on August 15, 1830 and in his twenty second year married Mary E. Sloane, daughter of John Sloane, onetime congressman from Ohio and also Secretary of the Treasury. Removing to Minneapolis they took a claim to 152 acres before the land was surveyed. Later when the land was put on the market and the government was to be paid, Lauderdale had to borrow money at the rate of five per cent a month. After farming a number of years, during which time he introduced fancy poultry into the area he retired to the city in 1868 and engaged in the real estate business.

Another pioneer of early days was Jonathan T. Grimes. He was born in Loudon County, Virginia, May 10, 1818, a descendant of pioneers of 1642. In 1839 he made a horseback trip from Leesburg, Virginia to Chicago and four years later located near Terre Haute, Indiana, where he married Eliza A. Gordon. In 1855 he migrated to Minnesota Territory and four years later bought the homestead in what is now St. Louis Park. There he raised fruit and farmed and made a distinguished name in horticulture becoming a member of the State Horticultural Society and the

State Agricultural Society, of which he was a life member. Once a Quaker, he followed his mother's faith, until he came west when he became a Presbyterian. He retired to Minneapolis in 1884 and died February 10, 1903.

In another section of Minneapolis township which was to become St. Louis Park one would find a pioneer in Jeremiah Falvey who was born in County Cork, Ireland in November 1825. Coming to the United States in 1849, no doubt because of the severe potato famine in his homeland, he married Hanora Guinness on his birthday November 11, 1854, and shortly afterward removed to Hennepin County, Minnesota Territory. In the spring of 1855 he took a claim in section 8 about a mile north of the present railroad depots. To this family were born eleven children, nine of whom lived to maturity. An ardent Democrat, he and his family became the bulwarks of the Democratic Party in the area in addition to serving on the school board and as justice of peace for the township. His first claim of eighty acres was subsequently expanded. He farmed until his death to February of 1884. Daniel J. Falvey, his son, is probably the first white child born to what is now St. Louis Park, the date of his birth being February 24, 1857. [Chesley Hamilton is reputed by one historian as having been the first white child born in St. Louis Park, but within five pages of this statement he gives the birthday of D.J. Falvey which is eight months earlier.]

Another pioneer of Irish descent who settled to St. Louis Park area and contributed greatly to its development was Joseph Hamilton. Born in Dexter, Maine to July 1836, he received a common school education and later worked in a store and post office. Coming to Minnesota as a bachelor, he took a claim to 160 acres lying to sections 16 and 17, in May of 1855. Mr. Hamilton was married three times: first to Olivia Pratt to which union one child Chesley was born; his wife died to 1864; his second wife was Eliza Moore who bore three children before her death to 1878; his third wife was Sarah Moore, a sister of his second wife, whom he married in 1865, three children were born to this union. Mr. Hamilton was a leader in the community, being instrumental in platting St. Louis Park, in 1886, after which he established a store in 1888. After selling some of his property in 1890 to Minneapolis Land and Investment Company he reinvested the proceeds in building houses and commercial buildings. He was the second postmaster of St. Louis Park. In addition, he was mayor and helped organize the independent school district.

Joel Barber Clough was another of the pioneers who made significant contributions to society. Born in Palmer, Massachusetts on October 50, 1823, he came to Minnesota and bought a claim in section 17. Clough was a civil engineer and was instrumental in the organization of the railroad which was to become the Minneapolis and St. Louis. Later he served as city engineer for Minneapolis.

The Christopher Hanke family represented one of the earliest German immigrants to settle in what was to become St. Louis Park. Born on June 29, 1826 in Lippe, Germany he was married to Frederika Steinman on November 9, 1850 (born November 9, 1850 at Cassell, Germany) before coming to the United States in 1854. After a three year sojourn in Ohio he came by wagon to this area arriving May 19, 1857 and after living three years in the city rented a farm until 1864 when he bought 205 acres in sections 5, 6, and 7 on the west side of Lake Calhoun. One part of the farm he bought was the old Minneapolis Poor Farm. Mr. Hanke was always a farmer, specializing in

purebred livestock, Jersey cattle, Chester White and Poland China hogs. The barn on the farm in later years was reputed to be one of the largest in the state, measuring 88 by 36 feet, and was four stories high. A three story granary was used which measured 73 by 24 feet. In the 1890's the farm was producing 2,000 pounds of butter yearly for private customers. He died on September 4, 1903.

The Albert Harrison Baston family came to the township on May 16, 1860 and bought an 80 acre tract of land which today lies along the Belt Line and Excelsior Boulevard. It would be located in section 7, west of the Hanke farm. Later when the father died the mother divided the tract between her four children in such a manner that each got twenty acres, and each parcel fronted on a road. The sons and daughters with the in-laws have played a prominent part in the building up of St. Louis Park.

Other interesting settlers of early date were, Lazarus Tilleny who had a farm between the Hankes and the Bastons in section 7 and J.B. Lobdell whose farm was in section 17, close to the above named. Martin Van Buren Pratt and his wife Harriet Hawkes Pratt had a farm on Excelsior Road. Pratt was of the New England contingent who found homes in the St. Louis Park area. He had been born in Clinton, Maine on November 10, 1833 and had first settled in what is now Midway District in Ramsey County. After his marriage to Harriet Hawkes on March 15, 1858, [William M. Jones the author of the chapter on St. Louis Park in History of Hennepin County by John H. Stevens gives two dates for the marriage, one on page 1254 and another on page 1262] they lived briefly in Richfield until 1860 when they moved to Colorado to participate in a gold rush. Returning in the fall of 1860 they settled in St. Louis Park. With the outbreak of the Civil War he joined Brackett's Battalion and fought with the Union side until his discharge October 28, 1864 when he returned home where he farmed until his death on March 19, 1891. Another pioneer who came early to the area and took land was Job Pratt. His original entry for a 45 acre lot in section 21 was made September 7, 1855 and he received a patent to the land which was dated March 3, 1856 and filed January 9, 1858. Pratt was one of those men who served honorably in the War of the Rebellion which began two years after his patent was granted.

There are many other names which are connected with St. Louis Park but little is known about the families. The County Grand List of Taxable Property shows the owners of the land in 1857, and afterward, but gives no indication whether the owner occupied the property. The map on the following pages gives the names of the owners of the land in the section in which the land is located. Some names will be recognized as never having lived in St. Louis Park; Dorilius Morrison, William Woodbridge McNair, S.W. Arnold, a name which seems to have been connected with real estate business, and many others. It is rather difficult to get information about many of these early settlers because they left almost no records, and the county records either show only their official connections or are incomplete. [A birth and death record can be found in the Village Hall of St. Louis Park but it begins only with 1870. Tax records by the county reach back only to about 1860 though there are a few entries which show ownership in 1857. Even tax records do not show whether the owner lived in the area. Personal property tax records are destroyed after a certain length of time.]

What were the problems that the early pioneers had to solve? It seems inconceivable that they should have had any when one thinks of the comfort and convenience of people living in the same area today.

Among the first after arriving and staking out a claim was to build a house. One needed a house for two reasons, one to live in, and the other reason was that if one did not have a house and maintain a semblance of residence the possibility existed that someone might "jump" the claim. The original settlers built those homes out of the most available materials or out of materials which they had money enough to buy. The country was covered with a scattering of large oaks and other smaller trees and many settlers built log cabins, chinked them with wood and mud and lived in them. Others with more resources could buy lumber and build a house, a good example being the Laycocks who had some resources left after the migration. On the Hanke farm stood (and is rumored to stand today in modified form) a log cabin.

A second very persistent problem was that of food. Most settlers had to bring with them enough to keep the family until some kind of a crop could be raised. Usually the pioneer brought with him a gun with which to defend his family from Indians but also to hunt what game was nearby. The Laycocks, as has been related, augmented their almost meatless diet by killing wild game. But as the area became settled there was less game to hunt, and in compensation more crops were raised. What was eaten by the first peoples? Wheat and its products, the diet of most of the people in the western world for time immemorial, made up the heart of the meal. Little meat was available, even if the settler had money enough to buy it, because in a new community most animals are needed for draft work or for breeding purposes. Salt pork, shipped in, was the only meat available on the commercial market for some time. Corn, a plant originally raised by the Indians, and squash, could be raised but it took time - and one could get rather hungry in the meantime if nothing else were available. Salt had to be purchased, as was coffee and sugar, if one could afford them. It is perhaps the great scramble for food, the fight against starvation that used so much energy that caused the pioneer to fail to record his struggles to survive, or to note how a community grew in the new land.

And if the settler had fairly conquered these problems he still had to "prove up" on his claim. It will be remembered that he lived on the land before it was surveyed, and the government could not give title until they knew what area was being given title to. Thus, as soon as the surveys were completed and the land platted and on file in the United States Land Office, the settler had to go there and make legal application for the land and pay for it. The usual government price for land was \$1.25 per acre. A person taking a 40 acre tract would have due the sum of \$50 at the end of one year of residence, and this year was one in which the claimant was trying to build a house, plow, cultivate, and harvest & crop which was necessary for food. The problem of saving enough to buy his land was a burden which seemed almost unbearable. Thus many of the first settlers sold their claims almost as soon as the land payments were due the government - sometimes they merely assigned them to anyone who thought they [could] make the payments. The frontier was a land of failures and historians who survey the situation a generation after the land is claimed often remark that "this pioneer still lives on his original claim," a statement which is supposed to cause amazement because of the high attrition rate that nature took on the first claimants.

It was unfortunate that the settlers in St. Louis Park area should have had to bear an extra burden in the depression of 1857. While it had been possible for land to gain in value as the frontier moved westward, and which many pioneers hoped would happen, the prices of land declined in the depression of 1857. Some people still owed the government for the price of the

land, or the land loan agency, or a private lender. When the claimant found that the value of land was less than what he owed upon it, he was discouraged and often gave up and went back east. In Minneapolis some land and property values fell as much as 90%, and money became so scarce that merchants issued fractional bills (less than a dollar) to keep up trade. Furthermore, the crops of 1857 were poor. Banks, many of which had the right to issue money in their own name, failed, and the currency of these banks became worthless. Thus, one was almost compelled to use the barter system rather than risk taking an unknown bank note. In Minneapolis, the teachers went unpaid until local businessmen took up a subscription to pay the salaries. Taxes went unpaid, and it was written by one observer that virtually all property transfers in the county were made under coercion of law. This depression held on for several years and was only remedied until the Civil War was well under way. For cash to pay taxes and bills the settlers went into the "big wood" (St. Louis Park is on the edge of what was called the big woods) and gathered ginseng, a plant whose roots are esteemed in China for extraordinary powers to cure diseases and relieve exhaustion. In Minneapolis a warehouse was established to clean and export this curious root to the Orient. The depression was a problem which was persistent for several years and hurt the early settlers quite beyond the normal amount of difficulties.

Another institution which had to be created by the earliest people was that of government, especially county and township governments. County government was established before there were any great numbers of people living in the county. It was an act of the Territorial Legislature of March 6, 1852 which granted permission to formally organize the county. The township, however, has a somewhat different history. It will be recalled that when the land is surveyed the first step is to establish base lines from which lines are run north and south, and east and west. Thus blocks of land six miles long on each side are created. These might be called surveyor's townships, but it is not the same as a governmental township. Minneapolis Township was established by the County Commissioners in session on April 10, 1858. In the month of May 1858 interested parties gathered and elected township officials. The first set of officials was: R.P. Russell, chairman; Daniel Bassett, Edward Murphy, I.I. Lewis, supervisors; George H. Hamilton, clerk; L.F. Cook, assessor; L. W. Rhine, collector; Washington Getchell, overseer of the poor; George Huy and Henry Hill, justices of the peace; C.C. Beckman and A.P. Hoover, constables; and A.B. Kingsbury, overseer of the roads. Two months later the County Commissioners tried to take a tier of sections from the north to make up the township of Farmersville but the new township was never formed and the land remained in the Minneapolis Township. Two years later two tiers of sections were given to Lake Crystal Township. A most significant change was made in 1867 when on March 7, the legislature added the two northern tiers of sections of Richfield to Minneapolis Township in addition to areas north of Minnehaha Creek below Eagle (Rice) Lake. This meant that the people like the Bastons, Grimes, Hamiltons, etc., who lived in sections 6, 7, 16, 17, 18, 20, and 21 who formerly were Richfield residents now became Minneapolitans. [All tax rolls of the county carry everyone in these sections as Richfield residents until [February] 1867.] A month earlier a bill in the legislature defined the city of Minneapolis and gave the name of Brighton to all the area outside the city limits. There was so much objection to the new name that a subsequent bill of March 7, restored the name Minneapolis Township. It seems that the main reason for organizing the township government was to provide roads which was a major need of people living in the hinterland. But on the other hand, could the settlers afford to build roads? After all there began a depression 1857 which had not abated. The tax records will answer the question. [One tax most settlers protested about was that levied by the state to pay interest on a \$5,000,000 worth of bonds

which were given to railroad promoters. Few railroads were completed and the taxpayers felt defrauded.] William Constairs, who had 40 acres in section 17 had delinquent taxes in 1858 but managed to get them paid without penalty a year later. W.W. Woodward, who owned a quarter section (160 acres) in section 18 lost his land to the county for delinquent taxes. It was put up for sale by the county in October 1859 and was bought by E. Lewis for \$7.76, approximately the price of the taxes. Amanda Parker lost her 40 acres in what is now the heart of Louis Park to the county in June of 1865 for failing to pay \$2.00 taxes. G. A. Garvin bought it from the county for \$2.10. B. McCabe, who owned 40 acres in section 5, had delinquent taxes of \$4.15 in 1857. Bernard Cain lost his 40 acres in section 17 to the county in 1861 for taxes amounting to \$2.08, but bought it back again at the tax sale for \$2.11. Now when one considers that each acre of land in the area cost \$1.25 and in most cases there were improvements upon the land one can see the difficulties of the depression and the value of land. Government cost money, small as the taxes were, but the settlers did not have the resources to pay the costs.

Some of the other problems afflicting the settlers were that of churches and schools. The Catholics, who had no church in St. Louis Park until the 1920's, went to Hopkins (or West Minneapolis) to church. Most of the Catholics could be found among the Irish who lived in the north and the west sides of the township. But the largest group of Christians in the area were Protestants, largely from New England states, who belonged to Congregational and Methodist churches with a sprinkling of Presbyterians. No church building existed until the 1870's but itinerant and visiting ministers held services in various homes. As for schools, the earliest settlers were convinced that it was the duty, moral and legal, to operate a school and provide opportunity for the young to acquire the elementary tools of communication. Not far from the Congregational Church the first public school was established which took on the name of Pratt School from a nearby neighbor. Many of the earliest teachers later became prominent leaders in the affairs of St. Louis Park and Minneapolis, for example, Winslow Paige Northway, who became an outstanding miller, Charles Rixon, and many others.

The general status of the county during these trying years will, by inference, reveal the status of the settlers in the western part of Minneapolis Township. In 1855 there were in the county 1,128 families comprising 4,171 persons. Of this group of family heads, about three-fourths, were native born while 338 were born abroad. In 1855 there were about 500 farmers in the county outside Minneapolis. Taxable property in 1855 was only assessed at \$54,565, and rose to \$157,000 in 1854 and to \$505,781 in 1855. The county was obviously not called upon to do much for its citizens.

What the diversions of the residents of the west end of the township were in those trying first five years is not known. The winter of 1856 was a severe and the spring was late, and thus it might be supposed that the farmer was not overly interested in the momentous doings in St. Paul where a constitution was being forged which would permit Minnesota to become a state after having been a territory since 1849. No resident of the west end of Minneapolis Township is known to have taken part in the conventions. You note that the word is conventions, plural, because there were actually two constitutional conventions, one of Democrats, and another composed of Republicans. A conference committee was finally established which compromised the differences, and forged one constitution out of the proposals of the two groups. Eventually two "identical" constitutions were approved by the partisans though there were more than 500

differences in rather unimportant detail between the two documents. When submitted to the electorate the documents were ratified in the state by a vote of 50,055 to 571. Furthermore, in the same election the "party of experience", the Democrats, secured most of the offices in their contest with the newly formed Republican group. No doubt these facts were stated with a certain amount of fervor in most homes for by this time most residents were taking rather decided stands about the "impending crisis," the seeming breakup of the Union. Though the depression of 1857 was upon the people of the state, Congress admitted Minnesota to the Union on May 11, 1858.

The first five years of settlement were eventful and tragic, with poverty, depression, and the problems of establishment of institutions almost beyond the energies of humans. But the groundwork was laid and time rushed on into the second half decade to which we next turn our attention.