

Minnesota Calling

Dr. Harold Cater

Director, Minnesota Historical Society

Minnesota's history is so extended and so dramatic, ranging from 1615 to the present—even if the runestone date of 1362 is rejected—that it should not be difficult to make it appealing to the tourist.

Posters for Minnesota could depict Lover's Leap on Lake Pepin, Split Rock Lighthouse on its pinnacle of rock above Lake Superior, the Round Tower at historic Fort Snelling, the aerial bridge at Duluth, fishermen's reels and weather-beaten houses clinging to the rocky North Shore, forest scenes in Superior National Forest, Indian paintings on the Pictured Rock of Crooked Lake, the stockaded fort at Grand Portage against its backdrop of Mount Rose, the devouring jaws of monstrous power shovels in open-pit iron mines on the Mesabi and other Minnesota Ranges, "red bellies" in Lake Superior ports at straddling ore docks, Midsummer Night festivities among the Scandinavians, Finnish saunas among North Country birches and pines, the ancient Red Pipestone Quarry of the Sioux, dome-shaped Chippewa wigwams, Minnehaha Falls, and harvest glories in Minnesota's rolling country.

Sinclair Lewis' centennial novel about southwestern Minnesota in the 1840's is not receiving a tenth of the acclaim that Minnesotans could award it if they were a little more farseeing and energetic. *Northwest Passage* and *The Phantom Emperor* are masterpieces by recognized American novelists, yet how seldom one sees them displayed in Minnesota bookshops. A State alert to the possibilities of its tourist trade would show them continuously where tourists might catch a glimpse of them and realize that Minnesota's past has appealed to men like Kenneth Roberts and the editor of the *Baltimore Sun*. Tourists would love *Early Candlelight*, the story of early Mendota and Fort Snelling; some of Margaret Culkin Banning's and Darragh Aldrich's novels of northern Minnesota capitalizing on its romantic past. How many Minnesotans have ever heard of, much less read, Emma Brock's *Then Came Adventure*, a girl's story about Split Rock Lighthouse and Superior National Forest?

High-grade folkcraft shops and tourist

gift stores stimulate tourist interest. The tourist who buys an article to send to friends in distant places may awaken an interest in Minnesota that will bring those friends to see our sights and buy more articles to send to more friends. So the circles widen. The recipient of a doll depicting Father Hennepin, Radisson, a North Shore fisherman, or a Mesabi ore miner, a replica of a Red River cart, one of those sturdy splint baskets made only by Minnesota's Finns, or some other uniquely Minnesota article, will be enthusiastic to see Minnesota. Tourist shops carrying only authentic items have not appeared in Minnesota until recently. They should be encouraged.

Festivals and pageants delight the tourist's soul, so why not support the Finnish Shrovetide fetes, Midsummer Night dances and celebrations of Scandinavians, Christmas pageantry of the Slavs, Easter eggs that are works of art among the Ukrainians and other South European stocks, and other colorful manifestations of artistry and fun already well rooted in Minnesota? Canoe races, log rolling, *cantele* singing among the Finns, Slavic wedding parties, and similar events have enlivened the Minnesota scene for generations and make a powerful appeal to outsiders. They could be better publicized and more generously supported.

Symbols of early transportation in Minnesota—dog sleds, Red River carts, side-wheelers, York boats, birchbark canoes, and snowshoes—could be utilized in scores of ways to attract the artistic and history-loving visitor to the State. Voyageur songs have a continuing appeal and have never been used to their fullest extent to draw people to this State. The tourist likes to believe that he is gazing at the unique and the typical in the region where he travels. Why not stress the Minnesota motif in every possible way?

So much on the positive side. Unfortunately, there is also a negative side to the advertising picture. What will attract more tourists than all else besides—one lone attraction? The answer is "ancient pines." Pines that are the symbols of much of the State's history; pines that heard the voyageurs' *chansons* ring out beneath their branches; pines that

watched Indians camping contentedly below; pines that symbolize the peace and romantic charm of bygone days. So, it seems clear, that if Minnesota wants to keep its present tourist level or raise it, pines must be kept where they are and grown where they are not, insofar as that is feasible. In other words, it must not let its greatest asset slip away from it.

To help stress the Minnesota motif, the Division of Publicity, cooperating with the Minnesota Historical Society, could do an important service for the tourist interest of the State by encouraging the erection of more and better markers for historic sites. Tourists are interested in historic sites, which would be adequately marked with permanent and attractive signs. New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Dakota, to mention only a few, have accomplished admirable results in this work; and Montana has erected markers that are the talk of its tourists, not only for their attractive design, but also for the lively and original slant of the information.

Minnesota might well emulate these States. Attractive, informative, and interesting markers would help to reveal Minnesota's personality to the tourist. By telling him something of the State's backgrounds, by pointing out its individuality, they would help him to know Minnesota and feel at home here.

A still further development of this project would be a small, cheap pamphlet listing Minnesota's historic sites, with a brief paragraph for each of them. This compilation would, of course, be based on accurate research; and, with accuracy as a keynote and interest as an added feature, it would further the coordination that exists naturally between history and the tourist.

(Reprinted from a paper read to a recent Northern Great Lakes Area Council meeting, Niagara Falls, Ontario)

New Publications Available

"U. S. Travel, 1948, A Digest," a summary of statistics on travel in the United States and territories during 1948, is available; also a folder on sources of information about National parks and forests, No. 4 of a series, the preceding three being: No. 1—Travel Information Offices Maintained by the States and Territories; No. 2—Where to Get Information about State Parks and Recreational Areas; No. 3—Touring Services for Motorists Offered by Gasoline and Oil Companies.