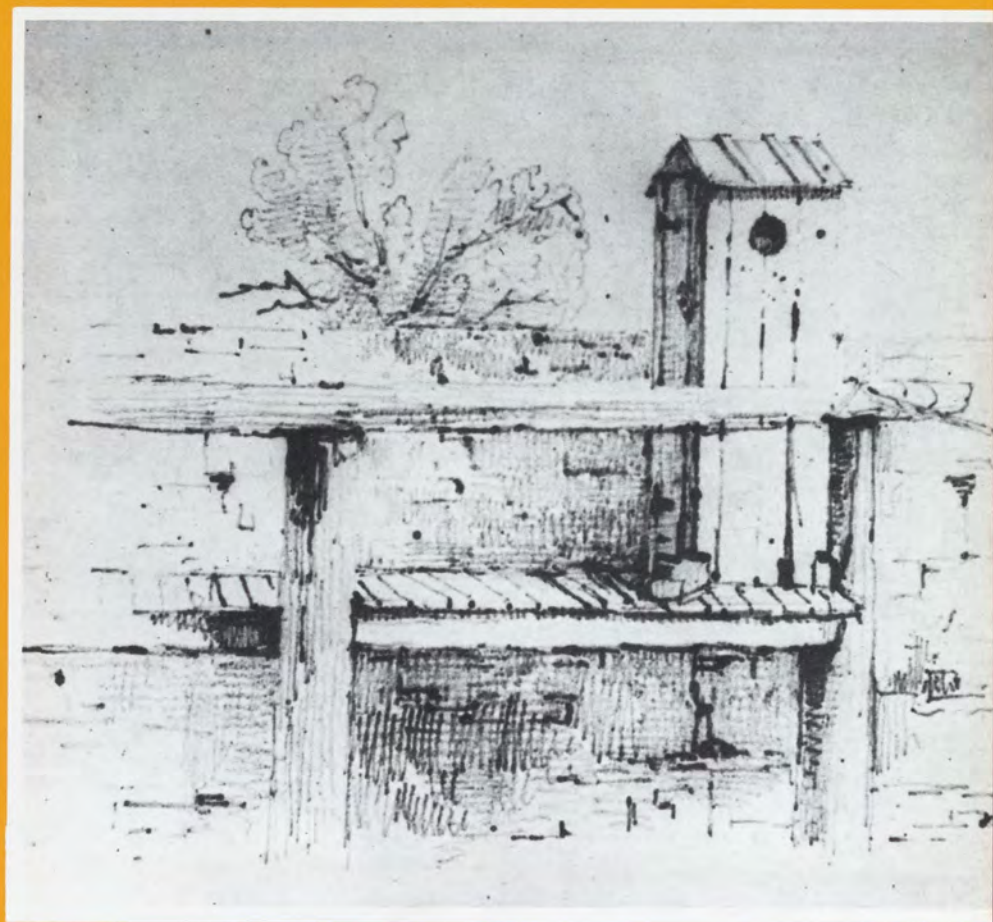


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ON THE COVER: This sketch by Seth Eastman shows a sentry box at Fort Snelling. Eastman is known today as one of the great painters of the old Northwest and particularly the Mississippi river valley. What is not so well known is that he was an army officer who served four stints as commandant of Fort Snelling, then became a brigadier general after the outbreak of the Civil War.

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In the restoration of Fort Snelling, men work on a roof covered with the type of hand-hewn shingles the soldiers used in building the fort. In the background is the restored round tower.

Fort Snelling- "Hardship" Duty At a Frontier Post



And a Training Ground for Generals

THE OFFICERS and men who were stationed at Fort Snelling during the years the fort was the nation's frontier outpost seem to have been as colorful as the wilderness in which they served.

Yet, as with other army men down the long years, the isolation and loneliness of what frequently was bitter duty at a hardship post weighed heavily upon them, and particularly the enlisted men.

Historians tend to write of military life in terms of the officers. The enlisted men often are forgotten, but it is their letters and journals that frequently describe most clearly the day-to-day struggle of life in the wilderness.

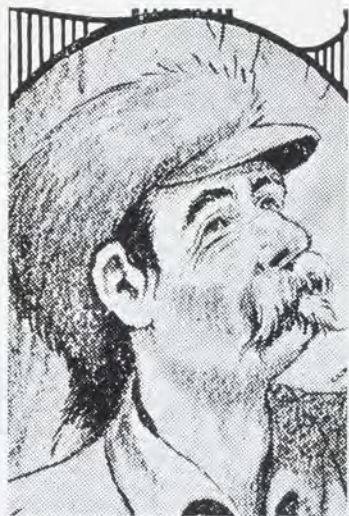
Gustavus Otto, an immigrant from Bavaria and a private, was one such man. He was stationed at Fort Snelling from about 1847 to 1850; during this period, he also spent some months at Fort Ripley. Otto seems to have been a man who was beset with per-

sonal problems, with poverty and loneliness, and who apparently felt deeply the hardship of service at a frontier post.

THE FEW LETTERS of his which have survived create a feeling for Fort Snelling, its physical surroundings as well as the mood of the place. When he arrived at Fort Snelling, after a few months at Fort Ripley, he wrote to his wife:

"I got dysentery, from which I thought I could not recover, but God helped me. Last winter we marched back again 250 miles to the fortress Fort Snelling where we remained. There for the first time I slept under a roof again, for until then we were treated like dogs and I often wished to be a slave.

As the winter rolled on, the severity of the weather obviously was hanging heavily upon Private Otto. In another letter to his wife, who was in Detroit, he wrote:



Martin Scott



Frederick Marryat



Bernard Bee

"The winters are very cold here, particularly this one. We are in thick stone buildings and each two men have woolen blankets . . . and yet we had to make a fire in the middle of the night in order not to freeze. We sometimes had to relieve one another to guard every quarter or one-half hour. I have then like many others frozen my ears, nose and face, but God gave me his assistance."

As summer came, Otto began to think about deserting. He has been writing to his wife and receiving no reply. In several letters during these months, he tells her that he is reaching a state of desperation and that he cannot take army life much longer. He also reveals some of the tensions and prejudices which afflicted pre-Civil War America:

"As if this were not enough, we have the Irish to contend with. We have many Irish in our company, from which we have to bear much. When they are intoxicated, they knock down everything and want to do nothing but fight. The guard house is always full. Thank God I have not come into the guard house, and as far as I know, our captain loves me very much."

The fort which was the scene of Private Otto's travail was indirectly brought into being through the vision of Thomas Jefferson, the first president of the United States to be interested in the West. To George Washington, the West was up the Potomac, perhaps to the Appalachian Mountains; for John Adams, the West was far away and

really not worth much. Among the founding fathers, it was Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin who possessed the vision of what the West could mean to the new nation.

It was Jefferson who sent Lewis and Clark up the Missouri on their long exploration of the Louisiana Purchase, and it was Jefferson's influence which led General of the Army James Wilkinson to send Lieutenant Zebulon Pike up the Mississippi in 1805 and 1806. From this trip emerged a plan for the defense of the Great Lakes region, and Fort Snelling occupied a permanent place in the projected cordon of forts along the frontier "for the protection of our trade [the fur trade] and the preservation of the peace of the frontier," as Secretary of War John C. Calhoun put it. We know now that Calhoun not only meant to keep peace between the Indians and the whites but also among the fur traders, which may have been even more important.

Establishment of Fort Snelling was under consideration for about a decade after Pike acquired the land from the Sioux. Several plans for the fort were advanced, but it took physical form when Lieutenant Colonel Henry Leavenworth led about 200 troops up the Mississippi River, then spent a disastrous winter at Cantonment New Hope near what now is known as Old Mendota. That summer, Leavenworth was succeeded by Colonel Josiah Snelling.

THE FORT thus was the result of a national plan advanced by the country's civilian

leaders, headed by the President and the Secretary of War. But its establishment was carried out by military men who were veterans of the War of 1812 — Leavenworth and Snelling, among others — and eventually became the training ground for officers who later were to serve in the Mexican War and in both armies during the tragic Civil War.

It was fortunate that Josiah Snelling came upon the scene when he did because it was he who selected the site for the fort. While the question of who designed the fort is still unanswered, there is some evidence that Snelling also played a significant role in its shape and design.

The importance of an historic site and what it meant to the people of its era often can be judged by how much is written about it, or how often it has been painted by artists. Fort Snelling was one of the most frequently painted forts on the frontier and, throughout the 150 years of its existence, a mass of literature also has accumulated about the fort. Evan Jones, author of *Citadel in the Wilderness*, has described how, as a boy, he used to play at the fort, poking about the old buildings with his friends. What drew him there was the fact that he knew something had happened there — he didn't know what — which gave the fort a permanent significance for him. This statement sums up what an historic site means to people.

JUST AS the site itself has significance, so do the men who served there. A colorful group of soldiers came upon the scene

shortly after Colonel Snelling left. Snelling had commanded the fort from 1820 to 1827, the longest tour of duty for any of the fort's commandants. One of his immediate successors was to become president of the United States. He was Zachary Taylor, the only president who has lived in Minnesota for any period at all. Taylor commanded the fort between 1828 and 1829. The building known today as the commandant's house is very much altered, but it was his home for about a year.

Taylor came out to the frontier from Mississippi. He was not a West Pointer; in fact, he distrusted West Pointers. In 1829, his men at Fort Snelling described him as "ignorant of fear," but later changed their minds and described him as "too ignorant to fear." But it was at such lonely outposts as Fort Snelling that he earned his famous nickname, "Old Rough and Ready."

Like Ulysses S. Grant, Taylor seldom appeared in full military dress. Lew Wallace, author of *Ben Hur* and himself a Civil War general, described Taylor during the Mexican War:

"There he was, leaning on a tent pole, his military blouse unbuttoned, a faded, collarless shirt and no tie, ancient shoes, and a slouch hat pulled well over an unshaven face. Dull and earthy, he looked like a wooden Indian of the tobacco shops."

What really counted was that he won battles; his years of fighting Indians on frontier duty trained him for the command



Winfield Scott Hancock



J. C. Pemberton



Simon B. Buckner

of the army in Texas where he defeated the Mexicans at Palo Alto and in other battles. While in Texas, he became a general. His victory over Santa Anna at Buena Vista in February, 1847, for all practical purposes ended the Mexican War.

A few of his letters from Fort Snelling have survived. Taylor was not greatly impressed by Minnesota. He regarded the area as the frontier, which it was, and, in one of his most pungent descriptions, he wrote that "this is the most miserable and uninteresting country." As a Southerner, he longed for warmer climates.

Another Fort Snelling officer who became a Mexican War general and went on to a distinguished career as a Civil War general was Thomas W. Sherman. Sherman commanded a battery of light artillery at Buena Vista and his battery was one of the great attractions at Fort Snelling, its home base before Sherman was moved to other posts. He retained command of the battery, however.

The Reverend Edward D. Neill, Minnesota's pioneer clergyman, educator and historian, describes Sherman as follows:

"He trifled with no one, and reckless was the man who would trifle with him." Once the pensioned widow of an officer sought permission to operate the ferry which crossed the Mississippi at Fort Snelling. One of her friends wrote, "It is a pity that her lovely daughter [must] live at a town where there is no society." Sherman indignantly replied, "I have no time with women who are hastening to be rich and fashionable. My habits by education, my principles are sound Republican government."

ONE OF THE most appealing of the officers who served at the old fort was Martin Scott. A veteran of the War of 1812, he came to the fort with Snelling. Very little actually is known about him; almost nothing in his own handwriting has survived, and there is just one photograph, which is of doubtful authenticity. Yet, others at the fort have written of him, so that a picture emerges of a man with a winning personality — this at a time when officers were not particularly popular with the enlisted men. Somehow, Scott surmounted this gap between the officers and the enlisted men.

Snelling disliked horseback riding, so Scott was the constant companion of the colonel's wife, Abigail, when she went riding. Scott also was a legendary hunter and there



Zachary Taylor

are many descriptions of how his dogs could be heard yelping off in the woods.

Scott seems to have been a favorite with the women and children. Charlotte Ouisconsin Clark Van Cleve, who came to Fort Snelling as a baby, recalled the day in 1828 when the first steamboat to ascend the upper Mississippi — the "Virginia" — arrived at the fort. Captain Scott picked up the three-year-old girl and placed her on top of the wall so that she could see this momentous event in the history of Fort Snelling unfold.

Another story was told by Elizabeth Ellis, a visitor to the fort. One day Charlotte Clark and her brother trailed and trapped a wolf. Scott rewarded her by buying her a new dress at the sutler's store and by giving her brother a pony.

The most vivid description of Scott was left by Captain Frederick Marryat, the great traveler, who, after visiting Fort Snelling in 1838, described Scott in this way:

"The principal amusement of the officers is the chase. They have some very good dogs of every variety, and here at Fort Snelling I had the pleasure of falling in with Captain Scott, one of the first nimrods of the United States. He perhaps has seen more of every variety of hunting than any other person. His reputation as a marksman is very great and there is one feat which is performed

... two potatoes [are] thrown up into the air, he will watch his opportunity and pass his rifle ball through them both."

Scott commanded Fort Snelling for just a month, but he was a fixture there for most of 20 years. He was killed in the battle of Molino del Rey in 1847 during the Mexican War. The frontier fort in Texas was named for him and, while it has long since been disestablished, there is a marker at the site near Austin which commemorates the career of this colorful and unusually well-liked Fort Snelling soldier.

A number of soldier physicians served at the fort during this period. One of them was Dr. Benjamin Franklin Harney; another was Dr. John Emerson, who was the owner of Dred Scott.

A large group of officers who were veterans of service at Fort Snelling went on to serve with distinction during the Civil War. Throughout the 1840's, the fort was at its height as a training ground for many illustrious officers. The Confederacy seemed to inherit more of these men than did the Union, but this was the story of the Civil War. Most of the regular army men were drawn from the South during the years before the war, and they returned to serve the Southern cause when war began.

ONE OF THE most illustrious of the Fort Snelling commandants was General



Edward R. S. Canby

Edward R. S. Canby, a West Pointer described as a "soldier, a Christian gentleman, tall, slender, and ceremoniously courteous." He served in the Florida War and the Mexican War and became a brigadier general just as the Mexican War was drawing to a close. He was called into service as soon as the Civil War broke out and served on several fronts.

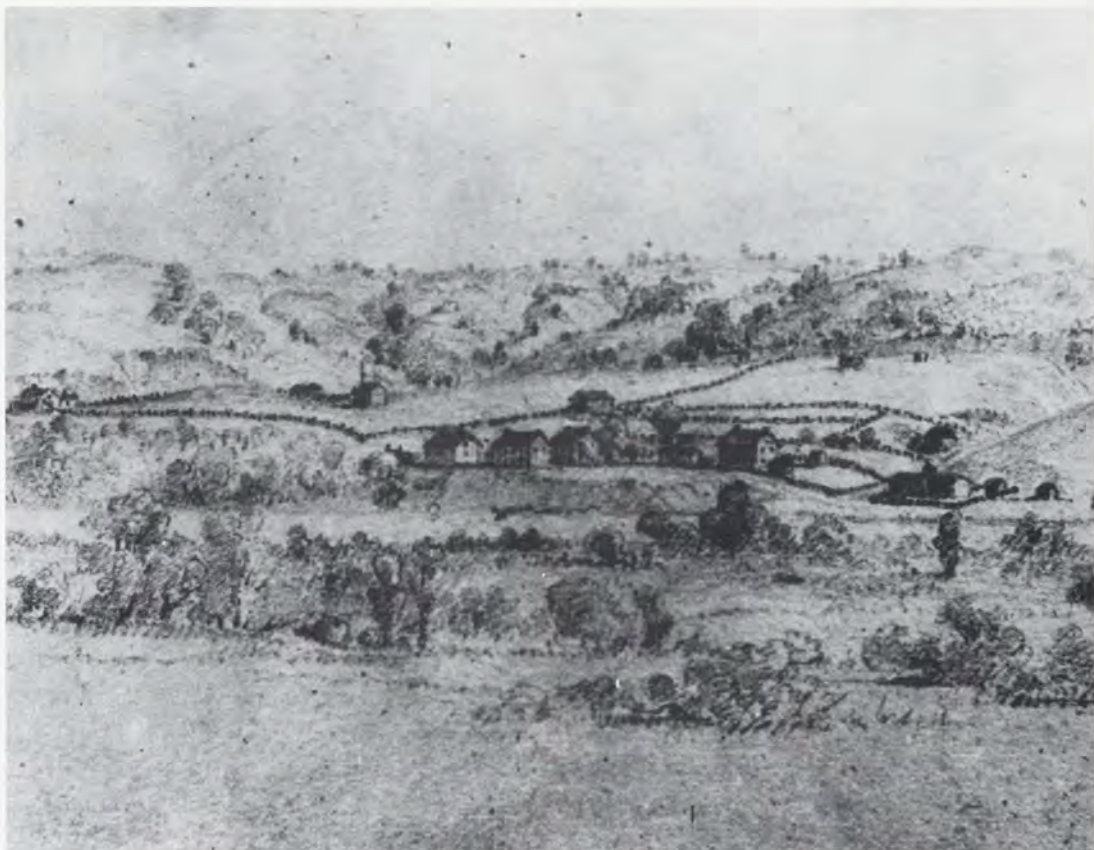
Canby came to a tragic end in 1873 during an Indian peace parley. He was killed by the chief, who was said to have suddenly drawn a revolver from his chest and shot Canby through the head. The town of Canby, Minnesota, is named for him.

Another of Fort Snelling's famous officers was Seth Eastman, better known as one of the great painters of the Northwest and particularly the Mississippi Valley. He served four stints as commanding officer of the fort, becoming a brigadier general after the outbreak of the Civil War. Assigned to quartermaster duty, he spent most of the war behind the lines. Eastman left behind him what many experts believe to be the most complete picture by any artist of Indian life in Minnesota.

General Winfield Scott Hancock, well-known for his expert command of the Union Army's Third Corps, was stationed briefly at Fort Snelling during the 1850's. It was Hancock who ordered Colonel William Colvill and his regiment, the First Minnesota



Seth Eastman



Infantry, to charge the Southern ranks at Gettysburg — one of the famous infantry charges of history.

THE HANCOCK NAME lingered for some time after Hancock's brief career at Fort Snelling. A brother became a well-known Minneapolis lawyer during the 1880's.

Of the long list of Civil War generals, Simon Bolivar Butler, a Confederate officer, was one of the truly outstanding men. He was a classmate of Ulysses S. Grant at West Point. Both men were members of the famous class of 1843. Butler served as adjutant at Fort Snelling from 1850 to 1851, and there he also was remembered as having been an officer who was well-liked, energetic and reliable.

One of the ironies of history is that this classmate of Grant's surrendered to him at Fort Donelson after the battle of 1862.

Another outstanding Confederate officer was John C. Pemberton who served at Fort Snelling from early 1859 to mid-1859, then commanded Fort Ridgely between 1859 and 1861. Like Butler, Pemberton also surrendered to Grant — at Vicksburg after one of the bloodiest sieges of this tragic war.

Seth Eastman's sketch of old Mendota as seen from Fort Snelling.

And there was Bernard E. Bee, who also served both at Fort Snelling and Fort Ridgely. He became a first lieutenant in the Third United States Infantry in 1851, and a captain in 1855. He resigned in 1861 to return to the South, which was his home, and to serve with the Confederate Army.

BEE ACHIEVED fame as the man who gave Stonewall Jackson his famous nickname at the Battle of Bull Run. Bee said, "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall." This was a story which caught on, lingered and achieved a permanent place in history.

The list is long. Fort Snelling drew its officers from West Point, from the ranks, from the immediate area around the fort, from the South, from New England and from what was then the old Northwest, the states or territories clustered around the Great Lakes. It is an impressive and distinguished list of the men whose lives and careers help to illumine the story of the fort which is the birthplace of Minnesota.



THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958, the Society erected a barn behind the farm house which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.