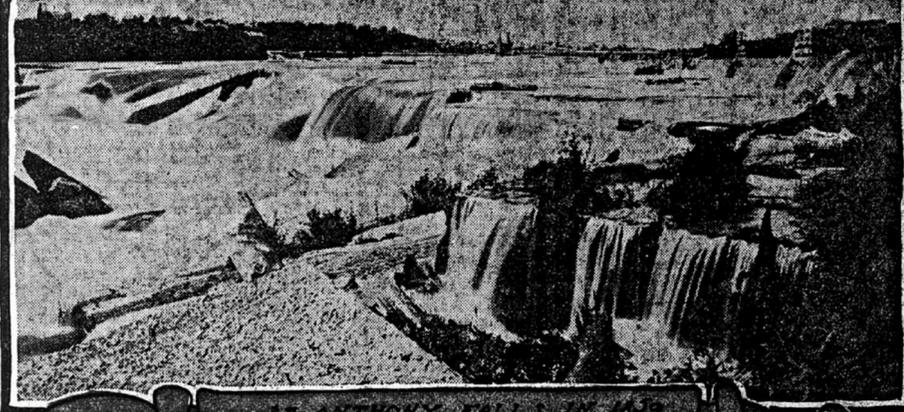
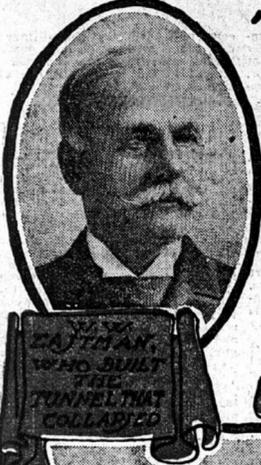


MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 15, 1905.

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

HOW the FALLS were SAVED

THE DISASTER THAT THREATENED TO DESTROY THE WATER POWER OF MINNEAPOLIS & DRAMATIC INCIDENTS OF THE HEROIC STRUGGLE TO PREVENT IT



Had the falls gone out as we feared they would when the Eastman tunnel caved in, the consequences would have been disastrous to the community. Industry would have been paralyzed and the towns would have received a setback from which they might never have recovered. I do not know of any period in the history of Minneapolis when the crisis was so acute and our people so anxious over their future welfare. And they never had more cause for anxiety.—Former United States Senator W. D. Washburn.

shattered, the fruits of years of unremitting toil and their cautious investments swept away in that awful flood which was pouring into the maelstrom and with ruthless power was cutting out the sand on which rested the limestone ledge retaining the falls—the main reliance of the pioneers who had cast their lot here.

there, in channels which avoided the full force of the main stream; they built dams contrived to let the water fall upon their home-made millwheels, which turned, creaking and clacking, but with force sufficient to grind wheat into flour, and corn into meal for the townsmen and the country folk.

in the river they comprehended what destructive work was going on. They felt that the bright hopes for a large industrial colony here were doomed. But despair gave way to stern resolution among a number of those who beheld the devastation. They would yet curb and tame the mighty river. The falls could and would be saved. There must be no surrender as long as there was a man left to fight.

Then began the search for stuff to use as filling. Hundreds of hands began carrying to the scene everything portable. Rocks, stone, bags of earth, wood, brush, heaps, even whole trees that were pulled from the ground by teams, were dragged to the place and dropped into the hole. When stuff of little or no value had been exhausted, other material of positive worth was taken—taken from anywhere, everywhere. Bridge square was then the central market place. On this fateful day many farmers were in town with loads of hay and produce. Frantic citizens went to these men, told them what had occurred—how the falls were going out; without the falls there would be no town—no market for their products. They coaxed them to give their goods to fill the hole, believing that the only way to prevent the worst effect of the disaster. Those who would not consent were coerced. There was nothing else to be done. So it happened that, added to the tons of material already dumped into the hole, were loads of hay and other stuff which came from the farms. The work was conducted with feverish energy. Men worked as they had never worked before.



"MAMA, why doesn't papa come home?" The child was in a playful mood. The mother's anxious face did not convey to him the meaning an adult would have read there. For more than an hour she had walked to and fro in the house, going now and again, thru the chill of the early spring day, to the gate, watching for the return of her husband. Meanwhile the meal had burned to a crisp while she tried to keep it warm, knowing that he had but a brief time at home at noon. She sank into a chair and the little fellow climbed into her lap.

Oh, I know it can mean but one thing—it's the Indians! In the street in front of the house a crowd of women had gathered and were talking excitedly. Their little children, feeling the apprehension that was in the air, had quit their play and were clinging to their mothers' skirts. "I was a-tellin' Alonzo this mornin' that if them halfbreeds were—" a little, gray-haired woman was saying when she was cut off by a shout: "Listen!"

A cry came to them from the distance. A moment later a young man turned into the street two blocks above. He was running rapidly and would not be detained, but in answer to anxious queries which he met at every house he shouted back, as he ran on, the dread exclamation: "The falls are going out!"

It was a cold, dreary day in the early spring of 1869. The ominous cry which the young man uttered was spreading over the little cities of St. Anthony and Minneapolis. There was consternation everywhere. Men hurried to the river's brink to see for themselves. Their worst fears were realized. Above the falls of St. Anthony and near the western shore of Nicollet island there was an immense hole in the ledge into which a cataract of water was pouring in an enormous whirlpool which engulfed everything that came its way.

All who looked beheld a great hole in the river a short distance above the falls. Into this the water poured, and from it it was thrown a boiling mass of foam. Not all who saw the sight knew how or why so strange an accident had occurred. W. W. Eastman, who, with A. H. Wilder, had secured control of Nicollet island, had planned to establish a large manufacturing colony on the lower end of Nicollet island. In 1867 he began the construction of a long tunnel starting from the south end of Hennepin island, extending beneath it and under the bed of the river, across to Nicollet island, terminating in the main channel on the west shore, probably about half way between the lower end and the suspension bridge. The tunnel was to be used as a tail-race, and by carrying it to Nicollet island Mr. Eastman expected to secure a head of forty feet for the development of hydraulic power. The plan had the sanction of the Chute brothers, who had a majority interest in the St. Anthony Falls Water Power company, which controlled the east channel of the river, and it was generally approved by business men of the two towns.

Then it was decided to construct a coffer dam above the hole. This work was conducted with the utmost vigor. Mechanics from the Milwaukee shops and other wood working plants were ordered to the scene. The teams began to haul timbers, the mechanics to bore holes, others prepared big dowels and in an incredibly short time the coffer dam had taken form and was growing rapidly. All day long the men worked, stopping only long enough to eat hastily the food which was brought to them from all parts of the two towns.



Another hour dragged on. The child had fallen into his afternoon nap. But the mother's mind was on the unaccountable absence of her husband. She determined to go to a neighbor, tell her of her new anxiety to kiss the child before leaving the neighbor rushed in thru the kitchen door, saying: "George has not come home for dinner. I wonder what is keeping him?" "Your husband, too?" The fears of the mistress of the house were increased. "And I've been all thru the neighborhood," said the visitor, "and not a man has been home since morning."

The hole grew with appalling rapidity. Mill after mill was undermined and fell in crumbling ruins in the swift waters of the east channel. The infant industries on Hennepin island, grist mills and other plants, were ruined and every one expected at any moment to see the main falls in the west channel collapse. Despair settled on the inhabitants of the two towns, which were beginning an era of prosperity after many years of adversity. They saw their hopes

The pioneers who had come from afar seeking homes and fortunes in the new northwest, stopped here because they saw, at first glance, the tremendous power the river at the falls would give them. These early settlers lacked capital, and devices for harnessing nature's forces were not so plentiful as now. But with the same spirit with which they felled the first tree in the virgin forest or planted the first seed in the land which, until then, never had been tilled, they began scheming to make the Mississippi work for them. Here and

When the cry arose: "The falls are going out," there was no need to tell the people further what had happened. The alarm went on foot and horseback from house to house; no telephones in those days; no well-organized police force to be summoned from many miles in a single moment; no messenger companies to dispatch their boys on bicycles and streetcars to arouse the people. But every man who heard the cry knew full well what it meant, and he passed it to his neighbor. They stopped not to discuss the way and wherefore of it. Abandoning stores, offices and shops, they ran to the bluff above the falls and when they saw the maelstrom

The tunnel work had been almost completed when, one day, the roof gave way and the river, in a mighty torrent, swept thru, undermining the foundation of the rock ledge. There was the gaping hole into which the water was pouring, threatening to tear away the rock and make the river

By night the dam was practically completed, the flues were partially stayed and the tired workers laid down their tools. As they walked home, crowds cheered them as tho they were soldier heroes returning from a victorious war. There was joy in Minneapolis that night. The falls had been saved. Danger still threatened, it was true, but a great and good work had been done.

The future smiled again and the day's results brought encouragement to the whole community. From shore to shore under the river near the crest of the falls there is a solid concrete wall 400 feet long, 40 feet high, 6 feet thick at the bottom and 4 feet at the top. Set in the rock of the banks at both ends, it stands as a permanent guard against the encroachments of underground streams, and it will endure for ages. As a further protection against the destructive action of the water an apron of heavy timber has been built across the face harmlessly. Geologists say that in past ages the falls were down at Fort Snelling and they have computed that it took nearly four thousand years for them to move