Tucked between the worn pages of William LeDuc’s 1889 diary is a newspaper clipping entitled “Too Many Poor Immigrants.” The article describes a report issued by the Boston-based Charity Organization Society – a forerunner of the United Way – “to investigate the question of immigration in connection with that of charity.” The authors of the report criticize the extent to which immigration has become big business for steamship and railroad companies under whose persuasive influence “poor peasants and laborers are induced to sell their property or mortgage their farms and come to America, where they are promised work at high wages.” That promise was rarely kept.

Not surprisingly, leaders of the Charity Organization Society recommended that Congress act to restrict immigration, citing the problems caused by an influx of destitute immigrants. The report concludes: “While poverty is no necessary disgrace to a man... the nations of Europe have no right to put off their paupers, delinquents and infirm, and no social science or spirit of humanity demands that they should be received here.”

The clipping remains a remarkable keepsake in light of LeDuc’s own efforts to attract settlers, any settlers – native and foreign-born alike – to Minnesota nearly 40 years before. His prevailing conservatism on the immigration question, doubtless the result of age and experience, stands in marked contrast to the zeal with which he had previously sought the attention of European emigrants. In the early 1850s LeDuc was among the movers and shakers, the eastern educated and expansionist-minded men who saw potential in the upper plains. And he knew well the challenges that awaited those who sought opportunities in the new territory. Neither he nor his friend and associate Henry Sibley, one of the first whites to call Minnesota home, harbored delusions about frontier life:

I have not desired to convey the impression that any one can prosper in that Territory, unless he be sober, frugal, persevering, and industrious; and my sole aim has been to induce those who are possessed of these qual-

Joseph Keppler depicted the hypocrisy of the anti-immigration sentiment.
ities, to remove thither, whatever may be their profession or occupation. And I take this occasion to state that none but such men, who are prepared to meet with the trials incident to the settlement of a new country, and to bear up manfully against them, should go to Minnesota, simply because no others can succeed.²

LeDuc’s sympathy with the 1889 article represents a nativist streak common in his day and a personal transformation emblematic of a much more malignant national trend. The United States had been changing rapidly since the 1860s when the Federal Government “gave away” millions of acres of land via the Homestead Act, the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, and the nation’s manufacturers developed an urgent hunger for cheap labor. But despite immigrants’ numerous contributions to economic growth and prosperity, by the late 19th century many Americans had turned decidedly anti-immigrant, sentimentality notwithstanding (Emma Lazarus penned her famous poem “The New Colossus” in 1883 and, as most American schoolchildren know, a portion of it adorns the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door”). America’s open door was about to be slammed shut, and William LeDuc’s enthusiasm for immigration had long since passed.

**Come to Minnesota**

When Bill LeDuc arrived in St. Paul from his native Ohio in 1850 he encountered a “straggling frontier town” with fewer than 1,000 residents.³ Minnesota Territory was barely a year old, but St. Paul was already attracting merchants, newspaper editors, fur traders, clergymen, and a “host of lawyers, politicians, office-holders, and office-seekers, whom we may perhaps call refugees from other States, though actuated by the hope of gaining some honorable position and a share of the public spoils.”³ Opportunity was in the air.

LeDuc’s origins set him apart from many of the people in and around St. Paul. He was well educated, a lawyer by training, and likely fancied himself a pioneer of sorts, “pressed into the Minnesota back-country to scatter the seeds of civilization on still another American frontier.”³ He had spent four years at Kenyon College in Ohio (Rutherford B. Hayes graduated just a few years ahead of him), enough time it seems to reaffirm LeDuc’s belief that his future lay beyond the family farm. Looking back he recalled: “A farmer’s life was at that time, as it is now, a life of constant labor, and of stringent economy, if it was to be successful; and while it was more independent than any other, it was also more lonely.”³ LeDuc soon found himself among the thousands whose adventurous spirit echoed in the words of Horace Greeley, “Go West, young man!”

Well before Minnesota achieved statehood, artists and writers captured the essence of frontier life and created lasting images of the nation’s newest, most mysterious territory. “Hundreds – literally hundreds – of settlers, emigrants, army officers, tradesmen, and just plain travelers jotted down impressions of Minnesota. Scarcely a corner of the state was not invaded by these traveling writers – men and women
taking a keen interest in the North Country and finding time to record steamboat trips, business beginnings, platting of new towns, primitive farming, and growth of cities.”

One such image-maker was John Wesley Bond whose classic guidebook, *Minnesota and Its Resources*, was published in 1856. Four years earlier Bond wrote:

The immigration to Minnesota is composed of men who come with the well-found assurance that, in a land where Nature has lavished her choicest gifts – where sickness has no dwelling place – where the dreaded cholera has claimed no victims – their toil will be amply rewarded, while their persons and property are fully protected by the broad shield of the law. The sun shines not upon a fairer region – one more desirable as a home for the mechanic, the farmer, and the laborer, or where their industry will be more surely requited – than Minnesota territory.

Bond’s description of Minnesota is long on hyperbole and, in hindsight, short on accuracy. (In his memoirs LeDuc claims to have come to Minnesota in 1850 to escape the early signs of a deadly disease. Ironically, within a week of his arrival in St. Paul he met a man who died, according to doctors, of the very ailment from which LeDuc sought relief – cholera.) Nevertheless, J.W. Bond did recognize a growing trend that would eventually have dramatic effects upon the future of the region. The marketing of Minnesota had begun in earnest, and Bill LeDuc played a leading role in the collective effort to bring emigrants to the land of “sky-tinted water.”

1851

The existence of Native Americans in Minnesota Territory constituted the main deterrent to settlement. (The harsh physical environment and lack of transportation also proved to be formidable obstacles. Railroads would not reach the Mississippi River until 1854, and steamboats provided limited access because of low water and ice.) When LeDuc arrived in Minnesota, Indians outnumbered whites four or five to one with the Ojibway or Chippewa people inhabiting the region north of St. Paul and the Dakota or Sioux living to the south on an expansive piece of territory stretching from the Mississippi to the Missouri River. Sporadic fighting between the two groups kept settlers on edge and prompted LeDuc to seek aid from Federal authorities. In the summer of 1851 he wrote a letter to the U.S. Secretary of War complaining that “the inquietude of the Chippewas above us and our exposed position on the frontier make it extremely desirable that we should have organized and well drilled volunteer companies.” LeDuc explains that companies have begun to be formed and “our militia officers are appointed.” But by the end of his letter, LeDuc’s true wishes are unmistakable: “We want arms. Will you be kind enough to have us informed of the proper steps to be taken in order to secure the arming of such companies as are already organized before navigation shall close and for the procurement of U.S. arms for such as may hereafter organize? The arms needed will be the best U.S. Rifle.”

Two years later LeDuc witnessed a clash between Chippewa and Sioux Indians in St. Paul and recorded the event in his diary: “Today a war party of 16 Chippewas on a hunt for scalps came into the edge of town. . . . The Chippewa’s [sic] fired into the store
and mortally wounded one of the (Sioux) squaws.”

LeDuc joined a hastily organized militia and pursued the attackers toward Stillwater before losing their trail. The event made quite an impression, prompting him to write his wife Mary: “The upshot of the matter we can’t tell but hope it will put a stop for a short time at least to the murdering excursions of these two implacable tribes [sic] much depends (indeed all) upon the management of the Government officers... It would be a wise policy to take and hang every murderer of every tribe as soon after the commission of the murder as he could be caught.”

But make no mistake; LeDuc’s opinion of Native Americans was firmly in the main. Public opinion likely fueled the following editorial from the Minnesota Pioneer, the territory’s first and most respected newspaper:

The wants of the whites have demanded this sacrifice, as they will require another a few years hence, to be again followed by another and another, until the race becomes extinct, and the vast country west of us becomes populated by a more useful class. The land which now provides for the Indians a precarious subsistence from the animal and vegetable products which Nature has provided, will be brought under the control of the agriculturalist [sic], the miner and the mechanic, and become assistant in furnishing the luxuries as well as the necessities of life, for many portions of the world.

Such rhetoric only intensified the call for a permanent solution to the Indian problem. The immediate wishes of settlers and the long-term goals of Federal authorities were bound to intersect, and by 1851 they were virtually indistinguishable from one another. Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey, an up-and-coming political workhorse from Pennsylvania, was receiving identical messages from the territorial legislature and President Zachary Taylor, a fellow Whig. “Growth, development, and ‘boom’ were in the air, but the future hinged upon acquiring for legal settlement what Ramsey described as the ‘extensive, rich and salubrious region’ beyond the Mississippi. The expected boom that would, it was hoped, lead to statehood could not materialize until and unless the Indians were prevailed upon to sign away their lands.”

The 1851 Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota represent a watershed in Minnesota’s history. LeDuc attended the negotiations at Traverse des Sioux as a correspondent for Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune.
York Tribune. Along with James Goodhue, publisher and editor of the Minnesota Pioneer, LeDuc observed the proceedings, recorded his impressions for posterity, and helped readers in Minnesota and beyond understand the larger significance of what was at stake. Goodhue wrote of the first treaty: “It is the greatest event by far in the history of the Territory, since it was organized. It is the pillar of fire that lights us into a broad Canaan of fertile fields. We behold now, clearly... the red savages, with their tepees, their horses, and their famished dogs, fading, vanishing, dissolving away; and in their places, a thousand farms, with their fences and white cottages, and waving wheat fields, and vast jungles of rustling maize...”

LeDuc’s assessment of the treaties, though not nearly so pretentious, was no less prophetic than Mr. Goodhue’s. He had by this time opened a modest book and stationary store in St. Paul, no doubt to help bring civilization to the frontier, and soon published the second installment of his Minnesota Yearbook, a sort of year-in-review for current and potential settlers. What is most remarkable about his summation of Indian-white relations is that it might have been written about any spot and at any time on the American frontier during the half-century following the Trail of Tears:

It is therefore necessary for the Indians, either to change entirely their habits, and become at once an agricultural people, (which may be looked upon as impossible,) or to give up their lands and themselves to the guardianship of the United States, and thus to secure regular supplies and the paternal care of the government, as they gradually struggle out of the tepee and blanket into the farm-house and civilization. Equally necessary is the possession of this territory to the whites; environed as it is on two sides by a line of eager and expectant immigration, it requires the best efforts of the United States officers and Indian agents to prevent encroachment upon Indian rights, which would be sure to end in border warfare.

In light of The Dakota War of 1862 (more commonly referred to by its contemporaries as “The Sioux Uprising”), LeDuc was perceptive enough to know when history was being made, and its potential implications, despite having his eyes turned squarely toward the future.

**“It shall be surrounded by Civilization”**

For the next several years LeDuc focused much of his attention on getting emigrants to settle in Minnesota. In 1853 he penned an open letter which began “To German Emigrants and especially to the cultivators of the soil.” He continued: “I wish to call your attention to that portion of the United States called Minnesota as I think it offers very great inducements to emigrants from northern Germany, Denmark and Norway.” LeDuc believed that northern Europeans were best suited for the harsh climate and working conditions that awaited settlers in Minnesota. There is more than a hint of social Darwinism apparent in an official report on emigration LeDuc prepared later that year for then Governor Willis A. Gorman:

The greater part of the Germans, Norwegians, and Swedes who now emigrate, bring with them not only the means of reaching their respective destinations, and establishing themselves in some honest, if humble occupation, in our cities, towns, and inland counties, but they also bring what is incomparatively [sic] more valuable, honesty, sobriety, persevering industry, and mental cultivation sufficient to bring them, after a short residence among us within the benign influence of a Free Press.

And like many in his day, including Frederick Jackson Turner, LeDuc viewed the frontier as though it were a source of salvation. It possessed not only opportunity but the secret repository of America’s greatest virtues, “that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good or evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom.” Any person willing to risk life and limb in Minnesota Territory might reap rewards available nowhere else on Earth. At the very least
he’d be part of a westward movement destined to extend the nation’s ideals from one end of the continent to the other. In the words of one popular song from the era:

_We’ll cross the prairies as of old_
_The Pilgrims crossed the sea,_
_And make the West, as they the East,_
_The Homestead of the Free!_  

Progress had many faces in the mid-19th century. Population growth and increasing agricultural production certainly served as impressive measuring sticks. But by the time Minnesota gained territorial status, railroads had become the most recognizable feature of national expansion. They were quickly evolving into the lifeblood of America, and St. Paul proved to be a vital link in that development. Many years later James J. Hill, architect of the Great Northern Railway and LeDuc acquaintance, would recall: “Nearly forty years ago the thought of a possible railway enterprise in the Northwest began to occupy my mind. It was born of experience in Northwestern transportation problems that had occupied most of my early business life, of faith in the productive powers and material resources of this part of the country, and of railroad conditions at that time.”

Hill was not the only one with rails on his mind. LeDuc was instrumental in securing passage of the first railroad bill in Minnesota Territory. His name appears alongside those of Alexander Ramsey, Henry Rice, Franklin Steele, and Henry Sibley on the bill to incorporate the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad Company. LeDuc saw great potential in connecting St. Paul to the western tip of Lake Superior, the Great Lakes affording industrialists the most direct route to the continent’s interior and vice versa. In March of 1853 he wrote Mary of his plans to put Duluth on the map, quite literally: “You will remember I spoke to you sometime since about going to Lake Superior, did I tell you my object was to make a claim and lay out a town at the mouth of the St. Louis River?”

Although LeDuc’s efforts never earned him that distinction, contributing to the growth of a commercial center at the edge of Lake Superior would occupy his time for years to come.

**Making Tracks for Duluth and the Ohio Connection**

In the 1870s William LeDuc was a great promoter of Duluth and helped sell a future President of the United States on its potential. The Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library contains several letters and diary entries in which Hayes mentions his financial interests in the city. A sampling follows:

Columbus, January 31, 1870

Dear Uncle: I have been in correspondence with Jay Cooke about his new town of Duluth at the head of Lake Superior. It will be a great town of that region. . . . I want to put in five or six thousand dollars if I can raise it in the next sixty or ninety days. It will double by next fall, and may do a great deal better than that. . . .

Columbus, April 18, 1871

. . . Yes, I am a believer in Duluth, and am betting my share of a ten-thousand-dollar building that it will be a city. If I had more to spare, I would risk more.

Duluth, March 1, 1872

Dearest: I reached here this evening after dark. The snow is gradually shrinking under the warm sun, but is still eight or ten inches at least. The weather is good – bright, clear skies, and bracing, dry air. I walked out with General LeDuc and looked at the block. It is well looking. Talked with two of the tenants – the shoe store and the hardware men. . . .

March 24 [1887]. Thursday.

. . . I would say in a word, where the most trade and travel shifts from land to water and water to land there will be the greatest city. The most railroads and the most shipping come together at New York, at Chicago, at Duluth! Where the largest number of railway trains meet [sic] meet the largest number of steamships there is now or soon will be the largest population. Where steam on boats and steam on wheels meet each other and exchange loads there will be a great city.
LeDuc endeavored to promote the town of Duluth through associations with Alexander Ramsey and future president Rutherford B. Hayes. The Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad depot is shown here in 1872. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

LeDuc and Hayes clearly shared a similar vision for Duluth. They also had in common an intimate friend named William K. Rogers. LeDuc and Rogers were classmates at Kenyon College and close business associates in Minnesota; both were Directors of the Hastings-Dakota Railroad in 1866. Rogers, also a native of Ohio, eventually served as President Hayes’ personal secretary during his term in office. The connection surely played a role in LeDuc’s appointment as Commissioner of Agriculture in the Hayes Administration.

It is also worth noting that LeDuc was a close childhood friend of William Tecumseh Sherman. Though Sherman is perhaps best known for his famed march from Atlanta to the sea, he became arguably the most important figure in the nation’s so-called “Winning of the West.” LeDuc’s close proximity to men of national prominence and influence no doubt helped advance his career. It did not hurt that all of the men mentioned above were deeply committed to fulfilling America’s destiny.

Marketing Minnesota

In 1853 and ’54 LeDuc took center stage for two events that helped bring Minnesota national press coverage. The territorial legislature authorized the governor “to appoint a suitable person to represent the Territory at the World’s Fair.” LeDuc received the appointment, settled his affairs in St. Paul, and set out for New York’s Crystal Palace Exhibition. By all accounts, he did his fellow Minnesotans proud. He took a live buffalo with him to pique the curiosity of visitors unfamiliar with the frontier. He displayed corn, barley, spring wheat, wild rice, animal furs, and a host of other items uniquely Minnesotan. An article in the New York Tribune proclaimed that LeDuc “deserves the thanks of the Territory for the zealous and efficient manner in which he has discharged his trust.”

In his memoirs, Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster, LeDuc insinuated that he furthered the cause of emigration to Minnesota with one masterstroke of public relations. He recounts Horace Greeley’s visit to the exhibition. LeDuc pointed out that no other states or territories had brought agricultural products for display. He further reminded the publisher of the New York Tribune, the most influential newspaper in the country at the time, that he had once described Minnesota “as a barren and inhospitable region, unsuitable for farming, fit only for logging operations.” LeDuc continues:

Mr. Greeley was completely surprised, and wrote a long editorial commenting on the evidences of fertility and adaptability of the soil of Minnesota for farming purposes as shown by the exhibit, and scoring the management for not securing from other states appropriate displays of their agricultural products. This notice in the Tribune started a tide of immigration to Minnesota which has continued in a steady stream ever since that day.

That Greeley chastised the exhibition’s organizers for not highlighting agricultural production is beyond dispute. His editorial appeared on August 2, 1853, and it included high praise for LeDuc and the delegation from Minnesota, “the only section of the United States making any pretense toward a show.” What
Lake Calhoun, the Falls of St. Anthony, and so home across the prairie and along the bank of the river.” LeDuc is also credited with making preparations for a magnificent reception at the Capitol later that night. With over three dozen of the nation’s leading newspapers represented on the Grand Excursion, Minnesota was proving to be much more than a frontier outpost. It became the nation’s 32nd state just four years later. William LeDuc could take comfort in knowing that the civilization he long sought for Minnesota had most certainly arrived.

### Epilogue

Washington D.C., 1881

With only a few weeks of his presidency remaining, Rutherford B. Hayes asked his Department officers to make suggestions as to what he should include in his final message to Congress and the nation. Although it had little to do with his responsibilities as Commissioner of Agriculture, LeDuc chose to mention the immigration question. He later wrote: “I thought it a robbery of the birthright of the children born in the United States to permit foreign nations to send their surplus population, — destitutes, vagrants, and some criminals — to land on our shores, to be given a hundred and sixty acres of land, and invested with the ballot. I recommended a very stringent restriction of immigration, prohibiting all but the best.” According to LeDuc, Hayes responded: “This question of immigration is a great and difficult question. We are going out of office. I think we had better leave the responsibility for those who follow us.”

And so it was.
One is tempted to ask: What happened to LeDuc? At what point did his attitude toward immigrants become so jaded, so reactionary? Was there a single, traceable moment in his life, a watershed of sorts, at which time we can definitively say William LeDuc became opposed to immigration? The answer to this final question is no.

LeDuc, for all his achievements, did not exist in a vacuum. He was much a product of his environment as an agent of change. He reflected his times, for better or for worse, and his story serves as an apt metaphor for the country as a whole. What indeed had happened to America in the three decades following the Civil War? What had caused our nation’s affinity for immigrants to end? Or have we, as Americans, always been far more fond of immigration as an idea than of immigrants themselves? These are more difficult questions to answer, but infinitely more valuable.

One of the reasons William Gates LeDuc remains a compelling character is that he left so many of his ideas, experiences, and accomplishments behind for historical analysis. He was a gifted writer who took great pride in his ability to communicate with both his contemporaries and with posterity. To a great extent, that is the chief source of his uniqueness. The sum total of his life’s work may in fact appeal to 21st-century readers because of its accessibility. But then again, the very fact that few in his generation were so prolific, much less conscious of their own potential to make history, is enough to give us pause.

Endnotes

1 William G. LeDuc and Family Papers, 1760-1967 (WLP), Box 28 (1889 Diary), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).
2 Minnesota Pioneer, April 1, 1852.
5 Blegen and Jordan, vii.
6 LeDuc, Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster, 19.
7 Blegen and Jordan, 216.
8 Minnesota Pioneer, April 1, 1852.
9 LeDuc, Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster, 31.
11 WLP, Box 4/Folder 5, MHS.
12 WLP, Box 28 (1853 Diary), MHS.
13 William LeDuc to Mary LeDuc, May 1, 1853, WLP, Box 4/Folder 7, MHS.
14 Minnesota Pioneer, October 27, 1853.
17 William Gates LeDuc, Minnesota Year Book for 1852, (St. Paul: W.G. LeDUC, Bookseller and Stationer, 1852), 23-24, located at the Dakota County Historical Society.
18 Quoted in an 1850 letter from William Gates LeDuc to Henry Hastings Sibley, HHS Papers, Roll 8/Frames 00108-00110. LeDuc was encouraging Sibley, then a territorial delegate in Congress, to try and secure a land grant for a university in Minnesota Territory.
19 WLP, Box 4/Folder 7, MHS.
22 Blegen, 202.
24 William LeDuc to Mary LeDuc, March 8, 1853, WLP, Box 4/Folder 7, MHS.
25 An impressive number of Hayes’ letters and diaries (transcribed) are available online at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library. They can be accessed at www.ohiohistory.org/onlinedoc.
26 For a comprehensive study of Sherman’s career after the Civil War see Robert G. Athearn’s William Tecumseh Sherman and the Settlement of the West, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1956).
27 William LeDuc to Mary LeDuc, March 8, 1853, WLP, Box 4/Folder 7, MHS.
28 New York Tribune, August 16, 1853. The New York Tribune is available on microfilm at the University of Minnesota’s Wilson Library.
29 LeDuc, 51.
30 New York Tribune, August 2, 1853.
31 New York Tribune, June 14, 1854.
32 LeDuc, 163.
The DCHS has added more than 45 years of the Northfield Independent microfilm to the research library. The Independent offers valuable historic content and commentary on southern Dakota County.

Founded in 1887, the paper was taken over in 1895 by Clarence P. Carpenter. Carpenter was born in Connecticut in 1853 and came to Lebanon Township with his parents, Mary and Fredus in 1855.

After working for newspapers around Minnesota, he returned to Dakota County to launch the Dakota County Tribune in 1884. In 1892 he sold the Tribune to L. F. Farmer and J.B. Squires. In writing about the sale of the newspaper, Carpenter wrote, “The reasons that impelled us to take this step were numerous, and principally of the large, round, silver kind, known as the dollars of our daddies . . . a purely business transaction.”

Carpenter moved to Northfield and purchased the Independent from John Lawson in January 1895. In his salutation, he wrote, “We desire to send an especial greeting to our old friends and former subscribers in Dakota county. Our new home is just across the county line. The fact that our new paper already circulates quite extensively across the line will warrant us in occasionally making remarks that will be interesting to our friends in old Dakota.”

By the February 14, 1895, issue the front page of the Independent was dedicated to Dakota County news and his ties to Dakota County encouraged Carpenter to cover Castle Rock, Eureka, Farmington, Greenvale, Scio and Waterford better than any Dakota County newspaper. The Independent was a substantial newspaper, frequently exceeding 16 or 20 pages per week.

When the Dan Patch Electric Line started up, nearly every issue of the Independent had an extensive article on the front page, since the Dan Patch was destined to go right through Northfield.

During the early part of the 20th century, at the height of the Country Life Movement, Northfield, already an academic hub, was renowned for its application and advancement of such things as the farmers’ clubs and hot lunches in schools. The efforts of Rev. E.E. Edwards of the Castle Rock Methodist church were covered in detail. Edwards advocated an “ideal village” modeled upon Castle Rock, including a church as the community center, school, bank, even poolrooms or bowling alleys, but no saloons.

As the South St. Paul stockyards expanded, the Independent covered the arrival of Armour’s packing plant in 1919 and the growth of the cooperative livestock shipping market.

The Independent is also a wonderful resource for anyone doing genealogy in the southern part of Dakota County. Extensive obituaries and marriage announcements appear which are not always available in Dakota County newspapers. In the future the obituaries will be indexed and added to our online database.

Endnotes
1. Dakota County Tribune, August 18, 1892.
2. Northfield Independent, January 17, 1895.
In November 2003 an article appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press entitled “Sawmill’s logging off.” It announced the closing of a memorable moment in Dakota County park history.

The story described the pending sale of the Park Department’s sawmill after 25 years of service. The sawmill will be long remembered for a creative solution to an unwelcome moment in the history of Dakota County, Minnesota and the Midwest.

The cause for the unwelcome moment made its appearance in Dakota County in the late 1960s. A 1967 West St. Paul Booster article noted the appearance of two cases of Dutch elm disease. It was a moment to be expected. Dutch elm disease and oak blight were taking their toll on neighboring states and counties as they traveled relentlessly from the East Coast to the Midwest.

Most people remember towering American elms arching over boulevards and parkways losing their foliage in near domino order. Home owners watched diseased trees come closer and closer to their homes always hoping their trees would be among the few exceptions. Many homeowners circled diseased trees with holes and applied vapan hoping to sterilize the diseased roots before they came into contact with healthy tree roots.

Homeowners dreaded finding an inspector’s red paint stripe around their trees; it meant the trees must go and a bill would follow.

For County parks and wildlife preserves effective control was out of reach.

FROM SAVING TO RENEWAL

While saving trees remained an objective, the practical was removal of infected trees and killing the beetles under the bark. The beetles remained active in dead trees which were not debarked.

At first diseased limbs were cut off and burned. Eventually the tree was cut down, the bark and beetles burned, and the trunks converted to firewood or mulch chips or burned. The availability of low cost firewood was a boon to the sale of wood-burning fireplaces, heaters and stoves.
**The Dakota County Park Situation**

Dakota County’s exposure to Dutch elm disease was no different than in surrounding counties. An irony is that Dakota County started its parkland acquisition program in the 1970s. In some ways it added to the County’s burden. However, the County was probably in a better position to take action.

Besides County-owned administration and parkland, Minnesota state law made counties responsible for shade tree disease control in townships which did not have municipal powers. Chuck Lowery was hired as parks director in October 1971. Lowery had a degree in forestry from the University of Minnesota.

**A Plan and "Not So Rosy" Picture**

At the December 2, 1975, County board meeting Lowery proposed a plan for Dutch elm disease and oak wilt control. Lowery said that without a program a large percentage of the County’s elms and oaks would be lost within a decade. The board approved the plan which included the use of ground barriers and the removal of diseased trees. The County would handle removal of County and township trees, municipalities would handle city trees, and private property owners were responsible for removal and disposal of their infected trees.

The inclusion of a paragraph promoting recycling diseased trees for firewood gave a “hint” to the magnitude of the problem.

An article in the December 11, 1975, issue of the Hastings Gazette painted a bleak picture.

A Department of Natural Resources report dated October 1974 stated, “Dakota County has more diseased elms and oaks than any other metropolitan area county. In that year, of the 420,461 elms in the County, not including municipalities, 70,955 were diseased, and of the 1,224,285 oaks, 81,124 were diseased.”

**"Sharing Common Sense"**

In 1980 the Minnesota Counties Research Foundation featured the Dakota County diseased tree utilization program of the 1970s in the foundation’s “Sharing Common Sense” publication. In 1978 the County received a National Association of Counties award for its “Diseased Tree Utilization” program. The following is the text of the article.

**Dakota County Turns Tree Disaster into Common Sense**

**Background**

The Dutch elm and oak wilt epidemics of the 1960s and 1970s, which proved costly and disheartening to many Minnesota communities, has been addressed in a creative and common sense fashion in Dakota County over the past three years.

Question: What do you do with thousands of diseased, dead or dying elm or oak trees?

Typical Answer: Burn, bury or chip! The typical answer to disposing of elm and oak is still the answer in most of Minnesota.

As of 1975, it appeared that a combined approach of chipping and landfill disposal was going to also be the Dakota County approach. Furthermore, the Dakota approach apparently was going to be accomplished within a seven-county program coordinated by the Metropolitan Inter-County Council. M.A.T.U.S., which stood for Metropolitan Area Tree Utilization Sites, was just that, a seven-county study of alternative ways to deal with the problems created by the Dutch elm disease.
The 1975-76 study by National Biocentrics pointed toward seven tree disposal sites with tree chipping and disposal services provided via private contractors. However, the reaction to the proposal was not highly enthusiastic – especially in Dakota County.

“It just didn’t feel or sound right,” says Dakota County Parks Director Chuck Lowery. “We knew there were many more trees to utilize in Dakota County than the report indicated. We also had doubts about the ability of private contractors to deliver on what they were expected to do.”

There was another, underlying factor that bothered Lowery, who is a forester by background and a native of the west coast. “It didn’t seem to make sense to not make better use of elm wood than merely chips – especially when the County was purchasing lumber for other uses in the parks. People forget that elm is a very workable and durable wood. It will rot very quickly below ground, but above ground it can last almost indefinitely.”

The M.A.T.U.S. report also bothered County Forester Mike Nygaard, who suggested another alternative. “Let’s look at a sawmill operation as a way to provide materials for the park and also to take care of the Dutch elm problem.” Nygaard and Lowery spend considerable time over the next 15 months looking at sawmill operations and equipment in Canada, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Both Lowery and Nygaard are forestry graduates, with experience in the public and private sectors.

**A COUNTY DECISION**

The practicalities and economics of operating a County sawmill then began to come together during this same 1977-78 time period. The Dakota County Board was advised about the desirability of developing its own tree utilization program apart from M.A.T.U.S. “The Dakota County Board has been consistently concerned about finding good local solutions on energy matters and have given solid backing to this effort,” said Lowery. On a statewide level, the

Minnesota Legislature began to support local efforts to deal with the diseased elm problem through the Shade Tree Program. This program provides grants-in-aid for local programs and was available to help underwrite the Dakota County effort – whatever it might be.

The practicality of a County crew operating a sawmill was tested out by having members of the County Park maintenance crew operate a local farmer’s sawmill. “We had the crew run 300 logs and found out they could not only do it – but enjoyed it,” said Lowery. “We then had to pin down the type of equipment that would fit our scale of operation.” “We knew we wanted to have a portable rather than fixed operation,” said Nygaard. “This helped narrow our equipment
purchase choice down to the Mobark Sawmill made in Canada. This sawmill does operate better in a fixed location,” noted Nygaard, “but we have to have flexibility as we look ahead.” Having chosen to go the route of a sawmill also determined the size of some of the other equipment. The chipper was able to handle logs up to 12 inches – although much larger logs could be handled by other equipment. “We saw almost every log 10 inches in diameter and above and so a large chipper is not needed,” said Nygaard. Not every log over 10 inches in diameter can be sawed because of nails and concrete materials which play havoc with the 132-tooth sawblade. A once-over with a metal detector usually identifies such problems and if the metal cannot be easily removed, the log is used for firewood.

By early 1977, Dakota County was ready to begin a sawmill operation and did so with the following equipment investment:

**Dakota County Utilization Site**

**Equipment Costs – 1977**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sawmill (Mobark port-a-pac)</td>
<td>$48,733.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical Edger (Mobark)</td>
<td>6,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine for Mill (Cat 3306)</td>
<td>12,301.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debarker (Mobark portable)</td>
<td>56,950.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loader (Cat 920)</td>
<td>51,020.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Chipper (12” Mobark)</td>
<td>37,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordwood Saw</td>
<td>950.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Splitter (Vermeer)</td>
<td>1,600.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Equipment Cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$214,754.96</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since that time, a $46,000 log truck, a $24,000 log skidder, a $450 portable metal detector, a temporary cover for the sawmill, and miscellaneous smaller equipment have been added. The County’s total equipment costs are approximately $285,000. Of these costs, $117,000 has been covered by a grant from the state Shade Tree Program.

**Sawmill Operations**

Once sawmill equipment had been identified and purchased, it became necessary to develop a regular source of natural supplies. The County tree crew was regularly tracking down diseased elms and oaks on County property. The Cities of Hastings, Lakeville, and Rosemount supply most all of their logs to the sawmill. Other jurisdictions, such as Mendota Heights, Eagan, Apple Valley, Burnsville, South St. Paul, Bloomington, West St. Paul, the Hennepin County Park Reserve District, and the State Department of Natural Resources, are less regular users. Cottage Grove and Mankato have purchased products. In addition, any County resident may bring logs in to be cut. “Word of mouth and personal contacts are how we have established our suppliers,” says Nygaard. “We are somewhat leery of over-publicizing and generating more production than we can handle.”

The sawmill operation has continuously been based at Spring Lake Park, although the chipper has been moved around to other sites throughout the County. It can be relocated from time to time in the future if needed.

The sawmill yard is a working storage center for sawmill users and a display space for finished products. Each regular customer (Hastings, Rosemount, Hennepin County Park Reserve District, etc.) has a storage point in the yard for bringing logs to be cut. There is also a dumping point for brush and miscellaneous wood that will be chipped or made into firewood. The yard also contains a burning area for otherwise unprocessable tree parts.

An ongoing daily process occurs of material suppliers bringing logs to be sawed or chipped and returning for their products. The sawmill’s crew, headed by sawyer Dan Hernlem, goes through the process of moving the logs with a front end loader from storage to the debarking, to an inspection for metal, and from there to the sawmill, where they may be cut into various sized lumber for decking, fencing, tract bridges, blocking, rough construction, picnic tables, and shelter buildings. A five-man crew, composed of three permanent and two seasonal employees, operates the yard. The chipper is running throughout the day for logs that are too small or impractical to be cut in the sawmill.
“The sawyer is the key to the sawmill operation,” says Parks Director Lowery. “He is the one who can get the full value out of our materials and make the best use of our equipment. (Four trees can be debarked in the same time that one log can be sawed, so there must be close coordination in the use of all equipment.) Dan is our third sawyer since we opened and is very, very capable.”

Versatility within the crew is sought, according to Nygaard. “Every crew member can operate each piece of equipment so that the mill does not need to slow down due to employee sickness. However, only our sawyer is highly skilled at the saw at this time.”

Additional seasonal labor is used during the summer months to handle the extra materials hauled in, especially brush and firewood.

**Profit/Loss Picture**

“We attempt to run the sawmill at an approximated break even point,” says Lowery. This is reflected in the operation statement of the last two years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Operating costs</th>
<th>Production value</th>
<th>Balance (+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>$47,677.37</td>
<td>$50,427.94</td>
<td>$2,750.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>$58,403.53</td>
<td>$59,910.65</td>
<td>$1,507.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cost Savings Picture

The full financial picture of the Dakota County sawmill comes into focus when you take into account the cost savings for the County and other jurisdictions who utilize the sawmill. “The County Board wanted the operations to be a service to the public and to municipalities within the County,” said Nygaard, who oversees the pricing and sale of products. “We try to give users the maximum from the sawmill products.”

This concern about saving led Nygaard to send out a set of specifications to all users describing how material was to be brought to the sawmill. “We wanted trees and brush separated or else we would have to charge extra for our labor costs in doing the separation. We have never had to charge anybody as yet for separation.”

Municipalities within Dakota County may have logs sawed into lumber at no cost. For municipalities outside the County and individuals, logs are cut for $80 per 1,000 board feet or a 25% share of their market value. Savings are realized for any sawmill user under this pricing arrangement because costs are considerably below market prices.

Early in the 1976-77 analysis of the sawmill’s feasibility, it was recognized that the County, and especially the County park system, was a major user of the wood products. “We have over 40 miles to fence within the County park system alone,” said Lowery, “and if we don’t provide the materials ourselves, we’ll have to buy on the open market.”

Each year a “Dakota County Diseased Tree Utilization Project Report” is prepared for the Minnesota Shade Tree Program. In each report, a listing is made of the money saved using lumber from sawmills. This list is impressive!

Sawmill Elm and Oak Lumber Uses in Dakota County Parks in 1978 & 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picnic shelters</th>
<th>Picnic tables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>Fences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td>Loading ramp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tool sheds</td>
<td>3 pole barns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges</td>
<td>Parking lot dividers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluff fencing</td>
<td>Guard rail fencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery fence</td>
<td>Hiking trail timbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park gates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, sawmill products saving $6,992.23 were produced for Apple Valley, Eagan, Hastings, Lakeville and Mendota Heights.

The total savings for the above city and County projects totaled $169,926.99.

Sawmill Products

The products turned out by the sawmill are obviously dictated by the material coming in. When tree utilization programs were developed and talked about in the 1970s, it was assured that
it would be virtually all elms that would be processed through such centers. However, the spread north into Minnesota of oak wilt disease has naturally resulted in oak also becoming a sawmill product. In 1979, nearly 16% of the 115,997 board feet produced at the mill were oak. In recent months there has been an increase in red elm coming into the sawmill, which is a higher quality wood and commonly a 50% higher price. An occasional pine will appear in the loads and a rare black walnut came into the mill during the early spring of the year.

**The Future**

“There’s been a big change in how people look at trees and wood products in 1980, compared to 1976,” says Lowery. “Wood products are currently in heavy demand and like to be so in the future. We will need a steady supply of wood for the park system alone for many years.”

It is estimated that it will take another 10-15 years to totally dispose of the diseased elm and oak trees throughout the County. In the thinking of Lowery and Nygaard and the Dakota County Board, that is not the end of the sawmill operation.

“Any large park system is going to require a regular thinning, cleaning up, and harvesting of trees and brush,” notes Lowery. With this in mind, the County recently planted 150,000 black walnut seedlings, which can be thinned in 15 and 30 year intervals. Other planting and replanting programs should also produce similar opportunities for harvesting. The Dakota County Sawmill may be around for many more years as a regular local government activity. The Dutch elm crisis of the 1960s and 1970s may turn out to be a long-term boon for local common sense natural resource management in Dakota County and other Minnesota jurisdictions.

**Sawmill’s Logged Off**

Dave Roehl, owner of B&D Wood Recycling in Greenvale Township, purchased the sawmill in December 2003. He plans to use it to build pallets out of elm logs. The debarker was sold to a Canadian company.
This was going to be a banner year for two of the LeDuc daughters. Florence and Alice LeDuc, daughters of General William G. and Mary LeDuc, were having their needlework designs featured in the October issue of a national magazine, *House Beautiful*. This very favorable review would result in a jump in sales of their embroidered household linens.

At the turn of the 20th century, when most young women of their station were not involved in commerce, Florence and Alice LeDuc were running a business designing their own products and employing over two dozen women to execute their designs. They later employed a saleswoman who sold their pieces well outside the borders of Minnesota. How did they come to do this?

While General LeDuc was well known nationally as the first Commissioner of Agriculture and the LeDuc family lived in one of the most stately residences in Hastings, they were not a wealthy family. To augment their family’s financial health Florence began selling her embroidery in the 1890s. Alice added her talents as primary designer later and the Hastings Needlework business was the result. Alice designed custom embroidery pieces to complement a room, highlighting a structural element or a piece of furniture.

At that time flowing, flowering vines and arabesques were common in needlework patterns. Hastings Needlework did some of these designs as well as more unique designs. Some of their unusual designs featured dragons, griffins and birds derived from medieval wood carvings. They also used Indian designs and colors as inspiration for their work. One particular color in silk, an old China-blue, was a favorite of the LeDuc daughters. When this color was no longer going to be manufactured, they reserved the entire remaining supply for their future work.

They employed local women to do the actual embroidery. Not all of these women were sewing because they needed money; several of them were known locally for their embroidery expertise. Some of the workers were specialists, doing just one part of a design. To keep the finished piece looking coordinated, a detailed chart was sent out with the piece so each worker could see the desired finished result.

Sales of their work varied, depending upon how much time they could invest in it. When the family was temporarily living out of Hastings, their production went down. The business slowly declined until in 1919 Alice purchased a house in Minneapolis and began a lampshade business.

The LeDuc house was sold to Carroll Simmons in 1940 and he used it for his antique business. In 1958 he donated the house to the Minnesota Historical Society with the right to occupy it until 1983, with that right extended until 1986.
**City of Hastings, 2003**

After much effort and negotiation, the City of Hastings will receive ownership of the LeDuc Mansion from the Minnesota Historical Society. After bringing the building up to code, ownership will be transferred to the City with the Dakota County Historical Society in charge of tours, programs and displays.

While funding was available for the physical renovation of the building, money must be raised for the tours, programs and displays. Groups from Hastings are stepping forward to fundraise for this historic hometown building.

One of these volunteering groups is the Hastings Spiral Piecemakers (HSP), the local quilting guild. In April 2003 guild member Sandy Carroll brought up the idea of making a quilt to auction off with the proceeds going to the LeDuc Mansion Fund. With over 20 names on the sign up list it was time to do a little historical research.

The Pioneer Room is Hastings’ local history room. At the June 2003 meeting of the Spiral Piecemakers Cindy Thury Smith, Pioneer Room curator, showed the only LeDuc quilt in their collection to the quilters. This quilt is a hexagon scrap quilt made from Civil War-era fabrics. The entire surface of the quilt is covered in hexagons. While this kind of quilt is fascinating for textile and quilt historians it would not be that interesting for the average person.

Wisely, the HSP decided to create a quilt with more visual interest.

At the first design meeting in August 2003, a central medallion quilt style was chosen, similar to a design on a book cover brought by one of the members. The central diamond area would be made up of small hexagons, to echo the LeDuc hexagon quilt. On top of this hexagon background a fabric appliqué of the LeDuc mansion would be sewn. The central area would be bordered, then corner triangles added. On the book cover these corner triangles were intricately pieced units but the HSP decided they wanted something more directly linked to the LeDuc family. A trip to the Pioneer Room was in order.

Ms. Carroll visited the Pioneer Room to look over the approximately 500 tissue paper patterns from the Hastings Needlework Company stored there. Several designs that could be translated into fabric appliqué were photocopied. These were given to another guild member, Denise Vokoun, who would design the quilt and stitch the central building appliqué. In August and September fabric and money donations were solicited from guild members. In keeping with the time frame the LeDuc Mansion was built, Civil War reproduction fabrics were extensively used. Kits were cut and passed out to guild members to make small crazy quilt blocks which would be the outer border of the quilt. Fabric and patterns for
the corner triangles were also farmed out.

During November, December and January various completed units were turned in. On January 31, 2004, a meeting was scheduled at the Hastings Library to assemble all the various pieces into the completed quilt top. Along the way modifications had to be made to the design, decisions had to be made about what colors and placement of borders, etc., but it was all pulling together into a whole. After piecing the quilt, top quilting designs will be chosen. It will be quilted using both machine and hand quilting techniques.

After the quilt is completed it will be photographed and displayed at various functions, such as the Patterns of the Pioneer Quilt Show held in Hastings City Hall, July 2 and 3, 2004. This show will be held in conjunction with the re-enactment of the Grand Excursion of 1854. Minnesota Quilters, the statewide quilters guild, will be highlighting this quilt show and the LeDuc Auction quilt in their May newsletter. In 2004 Quilters Newsletter Magazine will feature designs by the LeDuc daughters in an article about this auction quilt in their “What’s New and News in Quilting” column.

If you would like to bid on the LeDuc Auction Quilt, plan on attending the auction on Saturday, August 17, 2004, during Hastings Rivertown Days.

For details of the auction call the Hastings Chamber of Commerce at 651-437-6775. A documentation packet about the quilt’s construction, including a brief history of the Hastings Needlework company, will be provided to the winning bidder.

References


One of the griffin needlework designs in the Pioneer Room collection.