Historical Journal Excerpt Describing Minnesota’s Tallgrass Aspen Parkland Biome,
from Henry Hind (1823-1908)

The ancient Lake Ridge...extends in an unbroken line, except where the river from the higher level in the rear has cut channels through it, from near Lake Winnipeg, far beyond the international boundary. At the crossing-place on the Roseau, about forty-six miles from the Red River, its height is estimated to be the same as at the Middle Settlement; it forms a beautiful dry gravel road wherever traversed, and suffers only from the drawback of being the favorite haunt of numerous badgers, whose holes in the flank, and sometimes also on the summit, are dangerous to horses; it is, apparently, perfectly level for a hundred miles, and everywhere, as far as my observation enabled me to judge, shows the same even rounded summit; it may yet form an admirable means of communication through the country, and it marks the limit of the good land on the east of Red River. This ridge is a favourite resort of the prairie hen (Tetrocupido), when they perform their curious dances in the early spring months.

from: Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and Reports of Progress on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition

Historical Journal Excerpt Describing Minnesota’s Prairie Grassland,
from Joseph Nicollet (1786-1843)

Thursday, June 28, 1838

We enter the Great Oasis, which offers the only direction to take without going into water several feet deep. This beautiful grove is surrounded by large lakes [Crooked, Great Oasis, Rush, and Bear] ornamented with aquatic plants, in which live innumerable families of muskrats and water birds. These lakes are from 7 to 12 feet deep, and the soil that surrounds them is suitable for potatoes and other vegetables. The distance through the grove is about 1½ miles. The growth of the various species forming it is as beautiful as any which can be seen in the basin of the lower Missouri. I will list the principle ones: 1. The linden [basswood] - 30 to 40 feet; the white birch - 20 to 30; swamp white oak - 20 to 30; swamp ash - 20 to 30; beaver wood [aspen] - 15 to 20; prickly ash - to 15 feet. As this oasis is protected from the spring and fall fires by the lakes which surround it, one can understand why the climate has been able to develop such a richness here. It is good testimony in favor of my opinion that all the prairies watered by the Mississippi and the Missouri are the work of the Indians who destroyed by fire the rich vegetation to assure themselves of animal food. Let the vast and shorn prairies that we cross remain untouched and the forests, with time will reappear.

from: 1838 Minnesota River and Blue Earth River Expeditions, Published 1843, Joseph N. Nicollet: On the Plains and Prairies, Pages 54-55, 66-67
We entered Rainy-Lake River on the morning of the 28th of August, and reached its head early on the 31st. The length of this stream is about one hundred miles. Its breadth at its mouth is about four hundred yards; it becomes narrower above; its average breadth is three hundred yards; its current is rapid and uniform; there are very few obstructions to the navigation, there being but two places at which canoes are lightened and towed up. The longest of these is about one mile.

At its mouth the banks of this stream are low and marshy; beyond this they rise somewhat, but present few hills; the river runs in many places over a pebbly bed. The country assumes a more smiling appearance, which led us to anticipate the meeting with limestone rocks; we saw none along the river, but some precipices, seen at a distance, were supposed from their horizontal stratification to be composed of limestone. On the river the rocks seldom appear in place; where we saw them they were principally mica-slate, sometimes, however, Sienite. Dr. Bigsby found staurotide in the slate of this river.

from: Narrative of an expedition to the source of St. Peter’s River, Lake Winnipeck, Lake of the Woods performed in the year 1823, by order of the Hon. J.C. Calhoun, Secretary of war, under the command of Stephen H. Long, Major U.S.T.E. Volume 1. Published: 1824

June 4, 1767
Came to the great meadows or plains. Here I found excellent good land and very pleasant country. [This is the area near Lake Pepin on the Wisconsin-Minnesota border.] One might travel all day and only see now and then a small pleasant grove of oak and walnut. This country is covered with grass that affords excellent pasturage for the buffaloe which here are very plenty. Could see them at a distance under the shady oaks like cattle in a pasture and sometimes a drove of an hundred or more shading themselves in these groves at noon day which afforded a very pleasant prospect for an uninhabited country.

We killed several of these buffaloes, one of which we all judged would weigh fifteen hundred weight and if the same could be fed as is common to fatten our tame cattle undoubtedly would weigh three thousand, they being by far the largest creatures in bulk that I ever saw...

from: Travels through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768. Published: 1778

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