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From the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society: Northfield (Minnesota) Bank Robbery of 1876 Selected Manuscripts Collection.

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November 20, 1962.

Dear Walter:

Last night I was reading further in your book on the Minnesota murder trials and read the account of the James-Younger raid in Northfield on September 7, 1876.

My father was born and raised on a farm five miles northeast of Northfield and was ten years old at the time of the raid. Of course it electrified the countryside although the search for the bandits was to the south and west. Father obviously had no direct knowledge at that distance and at that age, but my grandfather was a gregarious man although I suspect a poor farmer. He made up in the latter regard by having six strong sons as well as two competent daughters. I have no doubt that he and my father's elder brothers went to Northfield and gleaned as much as they could. However, my knowledge has come through second-hand hearsay, added to my own infirmities of memory.

There was a farmer quite close to Northfield who had a salty and possibly a saturnine quality and who was also a good farmer and a good member of the community. I do not recall his name but perhaps it was Yates. For example, he was not a churchgoer and on one occasion a neighbor died and he went to the interment. He stood in the back of the little group about the grave and leaned against the fence post of the little cemetery on the hill and listened to the preacher as he intoned the burial service. He heard, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust", "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away". Yates was heard to say to himself out loud, "What could be fairer than that."

I heard the following story from my father. Wheeler was a medical student at the University of Michigan and during the summer vacation was working for a local doctor. Hearing the shooting, he grabbed a carbine, which for some reason the doctor had in his office, and propped it out the second-story window and shot one of the fleeing bandits, who your book identifies as Bill Chadwell.

Later in the day after Chadwell had been picked up, the local -- I was going to say senior citizens but that term has now been usurped -- men of weight in the community, who were not part of the posse, undertook to bury the body, but young Wheeler told them that cadavers were scarce and were very useful for dissection purposes at medical schools. They considered this and allowed that since Wheeler had killed him, he was entitled to him. However, they did not want to outrage public opinion and it was suggested that the pine casket in which he was to be interred might be filled with stones and the body disposed of for Wheeler's purposes without this being known. Wheeler was a student at Michigan Medical School.

It was only September 9th or 10th, however, and either Wheeler's vacation was not over or the weather was too hot for transportation, so there was the immediate practical problem of what to do with the body in the meantime. Yates solved this by saying that he would take the body and put it in his pickling box which was a long, lead-lined box that he had in the back of his barn, presumably handy to where he slaughtered his pigs for salt pork during the winter. This was agreed to, and he took appropriate care to disguise the fact that he had put the body in brine in the box.

Shortly thereafter a young emigrant from Sweden who was working for Yates as a hired man came to Yates looking for his summer's pay. Yates explained to the young man it was not the custom to pay anyone (including the tradesmen) until the wheat crop had been marketed, but the young man remained persistent and again demanded his pay. Thereupon Yates took the hired man out to the back of the barn and took an old horse blanket off the top of his box, opened it up and pointed to the body and said: "That is the last man who asked me for his pay before he was entitled to it."

I thought of this story when I read your account last night and had in mind writing you the little tale just as I have written you.

This morning I checked the book to find out the name of the particular bandit and noted your footnote No. 28 in the Michigan Alumnus referring to the Ann Arbor connection with the matters. This tends to confirm my memory, at least as far as Wheeler and Ann Arbor are concerned. I also note that the citizens of Madelia did not have the same squeamishness that did Yates and his compatriots in Northfield.

Incidentally, my memory is that Wheeler became a very good and well-known doctor.

Your account also mentions John T. Ames, the Mayor of Northfield at the time. Presumably he was in the group that worked out this practical solution. There is another mild little story about Ames that I heard from my father.

Ames owned the Ames Mill which is in Northfield practically alongside of the old bank and near the little dam in the Cannon River which presumably gave power to the mill. (The mill has since been owned for many years by John Campbell of Minneapolis, the inventor and manufacturer there of Malt-O-Meal, the breakfast food which owes its success to early morning radio advertising).

Ames was a pillar of his church although I don't recall which church it was. Most of the people around there came from New England

and he may well have been a Congregationalist or a Presbyterian. In any event he was active in church matters and ushered at services every Sunday morning and looked after the affairs and financial well-being of the church. He had lost an arm, presumably in his flour mill.

Father periodically took the horses five miles into town to be re-shod at a blacksmith shop which was in partnership of two farriers. They were of differing religious faiths, one going to the church to which Ames belonged and the other, who stammered somewhat, going to another church. Father was waiting for the horses' hoofs to be trimmed and new shoes attached or the old ones re-bent into shape. The two got into a religious argument in which the stammerer was somewhat bested. He finally said:

"W-w-w-well at our church, we-we- d-don't need a one-armed man to pass the collection plate."

Incidentally another comment by the more ready-tongued partner was recalled by my father under like circumstances. There was a saloon across the street and on hot summer days the horse-shoers would leave their forge and go across the street to get some cool beer. The more vocal partner bitterly commented on the new bartender there and said that he was the only bartender he ever knew who would pour foam from both the top and bottom of a glass.

It seemed to me that these little items might amuse you, and again I want to express my appreciation for what must have been a definite effort to produce a very good book.

Yours truly,

Francis Butler

Mr. Walter N. Trenerry,
W-2764 First National Bank Building,
Saint Paul 1, Minnesota.

November 20, 1962.

Dear Walter:

Having just finished my small comments on the Younger-James raid in Northfield, I thought of two other old stories which might amuse you and possibly might amuse Russell Fridley and Miss Kane, so I am sending an extra copy with this letter. These are primarily amusing but they shed a little light on the normal facets of living on a pioneer homestead in that southern area of Minnesota which was originally part of the Big Woods.

My grandfather was born in Ireland in 1821, of a family which rented their farm a little south of Dublin. Somehow he got an education at Trinity and then emigrated to New York where he worked briefly as a civil engineer in laying out the New York Central right-of-way. However, he moved west to Indiana and then to Galena, Illinois, where he acquired the little hotel there and met and married my grandmother about 1853 or '54. U. S. Grant was running a poor farm in the area at the time and was a frequent visitor at the tavern run in connection with the little hotel. It is a family legend, but I cannot verify it, that on one occasion Grant signed the book for credit for a drink and added, "I will never drink again." My oldest aunt, Mrs. Kate Bowe, who was born about that time and indeed would now be 108 years old had she not died at 96, said that in her later years she tore out those pages in the account books relating to the tavern, feeling that she did not want it known by the family that her father ran a saloon as well as the hotel. Thus I myself have never seen the book but my Uncle Emmett Butler was familiar with it and Harold E. Wood told me that he saw the pages in question. It is of no particular moment and I add it simply to give the general field.

Grandfather's name was Patrick Butler. He had taught school briefly in Indiana and from Galena he went to Pine Bend, Minnesota, 10 miles south of here, and taught school and then farmed near Lakeville as a renter and then homesteaded within the Town of Waterford, northeast of Northfield. About 1863 he built a log cabin and was still using it when my father was born in 1866. Presumably additions were made and the house as I knew it was the typical two-story, frame farm house with a parlor in the front which was rarely used but which had a good pump organ in it.

There was a long diagonal territorial road which ran in a straight line from Northfield to Hampton and then went to Hastings and thus passed a few hundred yards in front of the farm house. Across that road and perhaps a half mile away a young homesteader came out and built himself the preliminary light frame building, presumably mounted on wooden sills over the prairie and facing southeast, with a little porch on the southeast side. It was

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essentially a one-room affair with an iron bedstead and a stove and probably a couple of chairs.

I have a little difficulty with the timing of this and perhaps the tale is apocryphal although I very much doubt it. A few years ago my Uncle Emmett Butler, who was the youngest in the family and was born in 1870, was asked to go down to a school party in the evening at Waterford which is a hamlet about three miles out of Northfield and about two miles from the old farm. Perhaps there was an addition to the school or perhaps someone just thought of getting the old-timers around there together, but in any event he went down. (There was a nice girl in this office whose name was Verona Stubbs and who thereafter married Raymond Devney of Waterford, and I think it was at her suggestion that Emmett was asked to go down to this party or at least she may have added the knowledge where the Butlers were. This is of importance only because the time element bothers me a little, although it is reconcilable.)

At any rate Emmett went down to the party and was introduced around, and there was one very old man to whom he was introduced and the old man asked whether he was a son of Pat Butler. When Emmett replied in the affirmative, the old man said he would never shake hands with the son of Pat Butler. Emmett was a very engaging man and made efforts to uncover the source of hostility. The old man was the young homesteader and he told how Grandfather in the fall of the year hitched up his two oxen in the early morning and drove up the long diagonal road to take his wheat to the mill in Hastings which undoubtedly was the King Midas Mill. He sold his grain and returned in the late afternoon and drove by the young homesteader's house which was near the road, and they waved to each other. Upon that, Grandfather turned the oxen in the short distance to the house and held up a bottle of whiskey -- Bourbon no doubt -- and asked the young man if he would join him in a drink. This was readily agreed to and they sat on the southeast-facing porch and got some water from the pump to mix with the whiskey and were sipping their drink.

Of course in the meantime there was the problem of what to do with the oxen since there was no stake to which to anchor them. Grandfather mastered this by passing the rope holding them through the window of the shack and tying it to the bedstead.

As Grandfather and the homesteader were sipping their drink they suddenly noticed that the porch was going away from them. It being late afternoon and the oxen, knowing their food was waiting about a quarter of a mile distant, decided to head for home which they did, taking the house along with them. The two men jumped up and the young homesteader ran to head off the oxen, but, as he related it to Emmett, "Pat didn't help me at all, he just stood there laughing, and I will never shake hands with the son of Pat Butler."

I leave it to the historians to try to figure out the timing as to when oxen were still used for that type of work, but I suppose that if the old man that told the story to Emmett was 90, he would have been born about 1855, so that the incident must have occurred around 1875 or '76 or about the time of the James raid. This would not mean that horses were not used, but only that oxen were used for a long haul of a heavy load of grain the distance into Hastings over dirt roads and presumably were used for plowing.

Sometime I will verify this as my Uncle Cooley Butler, who is now 94, lives in Los Angeles, is in very good health and has an excellent memory. He has recalled to me within the last few years once going to borrow some burlap sacks from a neighbor in which to put the wheat so that it could be carried to the mill for sale.

He also recalls on one occasion he was left alone on the farm for some reason and among other things had to milk 45 cows, two milkings a day, not counting the problem of feeding them and clearing out the barn. On that occasion one cow had got into a green pasture and had over-eaten on green grass which fermented and blew up her stomach and she was about to die. Cooley says he used the only measures, and took a butcher knife and plunged it directly into what he thought was the appropriate spot which relieved the pressure and the cow ultimately survived.

In connection with the dairy operations, which of course were much later than the early incident related, it was the custom to put the milk in milk cans and park them on a platform at the little station called Wallace about a mile and a quarter away on the Great Western Railroad between Northfield and Cannon Falls, where they would be picked up and carried to the Twin Cities for sale.

The neighbors were mostly Yankees and they regarded this Irish family with some hostility and indeed in connection with the borrowing of the grain sacks Cooley tells me the neighboring farmer was quite hostile and very grudgingly lent him the sacks.

My eldest aunt married one of the nearby farmers, whose name was John Bowe and who had been in the First Minnesota at Gettysburg where he sustained a wound in his leg. He was substantially older than she and died sometime in the 1880s. His younger brother ran the farm and Emmett tells me of one occasion when he went over to see him on some matter and found Bowe out in the barnyard with rubber boots pretty deep in the wet manure. Bowe had a letter in his hand which his wife had just brought to him and he was shaking with rage and held it out for Emmett to read. The letter was from the milk company in Minneapolis to which Bowe shipped and the substance was as follows:

"Dear Mr. Bowe:

When you ship to us, we would appreciate it if you would put the manure in one can and the milk in the others and we will mix it ourselves."

That story I am sure is true as I have heard it directly from Emmett.

Yours truly,

Francis

Mr. Walter N. Trenergy,
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