MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

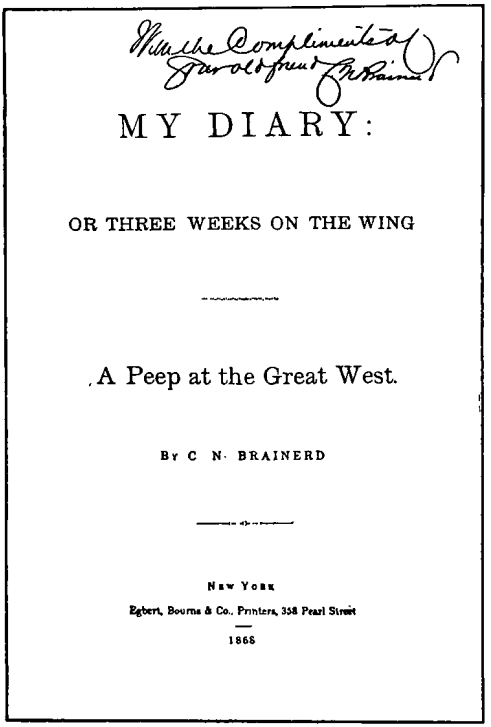
A NEW YORKER IN THE GREAT WEST, 1867

Many travelers had recorded their impressions of Minnesota's attractions before 1867, when C. N. Brainerd visited the state. Most of these visitors went by steamboat up the Mississippi, admiring its scenic beauties on the way; disembarked at St. Paul; glimpsed the rapidly growing cities at the head of navigation; made a few notes on the capital and the Falls of St. Anthony and Minnehaha; perhaps ventured as far as the embryonic summer resorts on Lake Minnetonka; and then returned as they came by way of the great river. But here is a traveler who followed an entirely different route because his interests were totally unlike those of the ordinary tourist. He left the river at Winona and penetrated the newly settled area of southern Minnesota until he reached a prairie farm in Martin County, where lived " an old and valued friend who had emigrated from ' York.' " Thus he visited a part of Minnesota that was rarely seen and still more rarely described by outsiders.

When Brainerd left New York on July 23, 1867, his equipment included a " blank book, and a low priced lead pencil." It is safe to assume that upon his return the pencil was much reduced in size and the pages of the book far from blank, for the entries that Brainerd made therein from day to day during his travels fill forty-five closely printed pages. He brought out the record of his western jaunt, evidently for private circulation, in 1868 under the title *My Diary: or Three Weeks on the Wing. A Peep at the Great West.* This little volume is now extremely rare; a copy is in the Library of Congress and from this a photostat has been made for the Minnesota Historical Society.

Of the personality and life of Brainerd, almost nothing is known. From the *Diary* it is clear that he is a New Yorker.

In the introduction to his little volume he relates that after "five years of incessant labor"— apparently in a business office of the metropolis — he was "granted a leave of absence of three weeks." Overjoyed at the prospect of "rest and freedom," he exclaimed, "I'm bound West!" And west he went, by way of the Hudson River, Albany, Niagara, Cleveland, and Chicago. Near Niagara he experienced the thrill of seeing the "first simon pure log house on my travels." The fact that he noted it well illustrates his interests, which were centered in frontier rural life rather than in scenery and cities. At Chicago he left the beaten path to go to Janesville and Columbus, Wisconsin, where friends from New York were pioneering; and then he traveled to La Crosse, which he reached on August 1 and where the extract from his *Diary* printed herewith opens.



MY DIARY:

OR THREE WEEKS ON THE WING

A Peep at the Great West.

BY C. N. BRAINERD

NEW YORK

Egbert, Bourne & Co., Printers, 358 Pearl Street

1865

REDUCED FACSIMILE OF THE TITLE-PAGE OF BRAINERD'S DIARY

BERTHA L. HEILBRON

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

[C. N. Brainerd, *My Diary: or Three Weeks on the Wing. A Peep at the Great West,* 23–39 (New York, 1868)]

[August 1, 1867]

Twelve o'clock midnight reached La-Crosse, and for the first time in my life set foot on a Mississippi river steamboat. The vessel appeared so queer looking that I spent some time in examining the establishment. The general appearance of the craft is much like a block of three-story frame houses in need of repairs. The first deck is devoted exclusively to freight, wood, &c., and the upper ones to passengers only. The guards of the main deck are minus railing from bow to stern. The engine is the queerest apparatus I ever saw; stands on the main deck and is comparatively unprotected, leading one to wonder why it is that in the hurry consequent upon taking on freight, "wooding up," &c., they do not get things so inexplicably mixed up that nothing short of the entire engineering talent on the Mississippi would be necessary to bring order out of chaos.

When I came on board, the scene to one uninitiated in the characteristics of a Mississippi river steamer, was novel in the extreme. Two boats were lying side by side; on the bow of each was what I should term an iron basket elevated some eight feet above the deck, filled with burning pine wood, rosin and other inflammable materials. The blaze sent up was absolutely frightful, as the red glare and sparks fell upon surrounding objects. Truly, thought I, this is the most perfect miniature conflagration I ever saw, and the sooner they "douse that glim" the better I shall sleep "as we go sailing on."

I cannot speak as regards other boats plying on the river, but I am willing to take my solemn "affidavy" that this is the most awkwardly arranged boat for passengers that I ever traveled on. Not a room is labeled, and per consequence if a man feels somewhat begrimed and is really inclined to obey the scriptural injunction, "wash and be clean," and goes for that purpose in search of the wash room, he is just as likely to stumble into the kitchen, and ten chances to one he'll get into a pretty kettle of fish before making his exit therefrom, as he is to find what he is in search of.

Turned into my berth and tried to sleep, but from the fact that I haven't got used to the unearthly screech of our steamer's

whistle and the persistent buzzing of these river mosquitoes, I find it impossible to do so until about three hours have expired, when I lose my identity and the winged insects which have sung so melodiously about my ears for three mortal hours are supposed to present their bills and wait for payment.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 2D.

"Bet my money on the bob-tail nag," were the poetical words which broke in upon my slumbers about 5 a. m. Looked out of my window with a view of setting eyes upon the individual who had so much music in his soul. Was rewarded with complete success; a legitimate son of Ham stood before me, and as he wound up the chorus with an "a dudah! a dudah!" I involuntarily drew away from the window through fear of being enveloped by those mammoth lips spread out before me.

We were landing at Winona, and from the upper deck a fair view of the place was presented. From its being the terminus of the Winona & St. Paul Railroad, should say it would become an important station. Am told that the W. & St. P. R. R. runs from this point to Owatonna, thence North to St Paul.[1] During the winter months when river navigation is closed above this point, it is thought this road will do a fair business.

I notice one peculiarity worthy of remark, *i. e:* That there are no docks, or wharves along the river, but simply piles driven down to enable the boats to "tie up" at some of the more prominent places.

[1] The reference here should be to the Winona and St. Peter Railroad rather than to the Winona and St. Paul road. The former railroad was completed to Owatonna in 1866, and from this point it was extended westward to Waseca in the fall of 1867. An "Express — Going West" on this line was advertised in the early summer of 1867 to leave Winona at 7:30 A.M. and arrive at Owatonna at 12:05 P.M., where it made connections with stages for Mankato. The St. Paul and Winona Railroad was built along the Mississippi through Hastings, and it was not completed until 1871. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota,* 3: 61 (St. Paul, 1926); Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *The History of Winona County,* 1: 466, 470 (Chicago, 1913); *History of Winona and Olmsted Counties,* 109 (Chicago, 1883); Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Rice and Steele Counties,* 2: 867 (Chicago, 1910); *Mankato Union,* June 7, September 27, 1867; *St. Paul Pioneer,* July 2, 1867.

On coming on board last evening my attention was attracted to the extreme length of their gang planks, which I judged to be not less than twenty-five feet. But on making the discovery that all their landings are made without wharf facilities, I saw at once the necessity of the case.

Took a hotel buss and rode to the Bauder House for breakfast, there being no facilities on steamer for that very necessary article. Owing to a rise in the river, buss passed through the water hub deep for about twenty rods. Reached terra-firma at length, also the hotel and a breakfast, after which rode back to steamer and depot of St. Paul & Winona Railroad.

Train moves out of depot and I begin my gaze from the window.

About five miles on the way, scenery splendid — hills on either side fifty to one hundred and fifty feet above the road. Land in the valley very fine, width about a quarter of a mile, considerable timber along the route.

Fifteen miles out, hills and valley continue. Learn that the greatest objection to these valley lands is the fact that frequent washes occur, from surface water flowing from the prairie land, lying back of the hills on either side of the valley. The water upon these occasions coming down the ravines with tremendous force, not unfrequently doing great damage to property in its course.

Twenty miles out, and we begin winding around the hills, gradually rising, passing high bridges, and at some points as we curve around the brow of the hill, the ascent is decidedly pokerish. These bridges we are passing are apparently frail and by the slow progress we are making, I judge it is not safe to run faster. We pass many cuts in the rocks from ten to twenty feet high. It is of peculiar formation, — the strata being the most regular that I ever saw — indeed the appearance is very much like large blocks hewed to regular dimensions and placed in their present position by some skillful mechanic, so symmetrically are they imbedded in the hills we are passing. Just passed a large quarry from which, I am told, all the stones have been taken for abutments of bridges and general mason work of the road. Am told that the same grade of stone is found all along the route traversed

this morning, although but few openings have been made. The stone is a lightish gray and should say would make an excellent building material.

We now seem to have fairly reached the summit and are coming out on the prairie lands. They seem A. No. 1, judging by the standing crops. Buildings so far good.

See an occasional piece of timber land as we move on, although for the most part the timber has been cut off and nothing but underbrush remains.

Am informed by a fellow-passenger who is posted on this section, that the only water they have of consequence is obtained from their wells, which are dug from 20 to 150 feet deep. Same authority assures me that a residence of twelve years in the country enables him to speak from actual observation, else, I should doubt his assertion, that there is more wood now standing than when he first came into the country. He seems a man of veracity, and it would not be christian-like to doubt the statement, but I confess that my impressions, based upon observations as we have passed, were to the contrary notwithstanding.

Corn very backward, wheat and oats heavy, potatoes fair.

Pass some very pretty groves which have, I am told, been planted during the past twelve years.

See an occasional running stream of water, but should judge they were mostly dry during the dry season.

The air, as we roll onward, is positively delicious; the sun is shining brightly and I am enjoying myself "muchly."

Prairie land now seems in the ascendant, indeed we have apparently emerged from the alternation of timber and prairie, and consequently begin our gaze over the vast expanse in right good earnest.

St. Charles announced. A thriving little place, — the first that appears wide awake since we left Winona. Land about the village, prairie, with here and there a small grove just enough to relieve the monotony of the former.

Fences I notice are growing scarce, not one-fourth of the land in view being inclosed.

Land splendid to look upon; but the thought strikes me that in winter, the inhabitants must need more fuel than they possess

to keep them from freezing; realizing as I do, having wound up those high hills west of Winona, that we must be sufficiently elevated to receive the full force of the cutting blasts of winter unbroken by a friendly mountain or forest.

I can compare the view from my car window to nothing else but a vast ocean of long rolling swells, with an occasional great wave which overtops all the rest, and as the cars pass they seem to be rolling away to the eastward and are lost to my view; but others are following them in quick succession as we go rolling on.

Could I plant an occasional ridge of mountain land well timbered, and locate here and there a never failing stream of pure water, I could, I was about to say, make here an international garden for the world, capable at least of sustaining millions of its inhabitants.

Have just passed a stream of water which I am told is never failing. The Railroad Company have just finished a bridge over it — the finest I have seen west of the Mississippi. At this point there is considerable timber in sight.

" Chester! " cries the brakeman. Look for the place but don't see it — for depot with like result. One passenger stands ready to jump on the train. The train stops and the " solitary footman " carries out his intention. Another passenger reverses the movement and jumps off, and we leave the celebrated place called Chester.[2]

Land for some distance has a wild appearance — an abundance of underbrush but little timber. A little further on, land improving rapidly and we suddenly come upon Rochester — a thriving place of 4,000 inhabitants.[3] Fine farming country about it. Business about the depot extremely lively. A heavily loaded freight train just leaving the depot, bound for the Mississippi river.

[2] A station of the Winona and St. Peter Railroad was established at Chester, about six miles east of Rochester, in the late sixties. A thriving village grew up around the station in the eighties, but it was later reduced to a community of a few houses. Joseph A. Leonard, *History of Olmsted County*, 279 (Chicago, 1910).

[3] Rochester had a population of 3,953 in 1870, according to the census of that year.

Owatonna announced — a place of 2,000 inhabitants. Here the finished part of our road terminates and from this point we are told that we must enter into the stage business.[4] Having come prepared to adopt whatever style of locomotion is in vogue in the sections through which we might pass, we get a good dinner at a small hotel and take our seat in the vehicle which is destined to initiate us in the mysteries of Western staging.

Land here is all prairie and uncultivated. But few houses and they of the most primitive kind. There seems to be no general line of travel, but every team and vehicle takes whatever course the driver's fancy may lead him. Occasionally we get upon what seems a well beaten track, and for a time seem to have at length hit upon a generally acknowledged highway, but ere we have fairly settled down to this conviction, our Jehu takes a fancy to strike off on a tangent, and we are all at sea again as to where we are going and when we shall be likely to get there. Such a winding, hither and yon sort of course as we are taking, for the purpose, I am told, of avoiding ravines, sluices, &c., I have never witnessed before.

On every hand the uncultivated prairie meets the view. No buildings to speak of, and not a rod of fence, except some small enclosure near the cabin of a settler who has commenced life alone in this unbroken prairie country.

We meet occasionally on the road, settlers with their canvass covered wagons, moving on to their claims or prospecting for the purpose of locating. Many of these wagons (or prairie schooners, as they are here called) contain the entire household, and goods pertaining thereto. A happier set of individuals it has never been my lot to see, and I could not avoid saying to myself as we met one after another of these prairie schooners and their inmates, "In this country you have found your true element, go on your way rejoicing."

[4] The Minnesota Stage Company operated a daily line of stages between Owatonna and Mankato, going by way of Wilton, Peddlers Grove, and the Winnebago Agency. It is advertised in the *Mankato Union* for June 7, 1867. The population of Owatonna was 2,070 in 1870.

One, two, three, four, and five o'clock, but no change in our general surroundings. The same blank, unbroken prairie continues, and I confess the monotony is tiresome and the general appearance a little gloomy.

Have ridden all day till we bring up at what is called Winnebago Agency.[5] Am sore from head to foot, especially in —— the seat of my trowsers. Put up at a regular country tavern, got supper and soon after, in company with a fellow stager and a tallow dip, sought our couch and dreamland.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3d.

Half past three, routed out by the summons from our Jehu "all aboard!" Clambered into the stage amid the darkness and started for Mankato, some twelve miles distant. As daylight dawns upon us I notice we are passing through heavily timbered land, — the best I have seen in the State. Crops, where a clearing has been made, are first class. The mosquitoes through this timber are the most zealous workers, the most persistent fighters and the most unshakeoffable of any enemy, which it has ever been my misfortune to meet in combat.

Crossing the Leseuer river, reminds one of the old saying in regard to "making two bites of a cherry." First our leaders were taken over by the model ferry-boat, then the wheel-horses, and, lastly, the stage and contents. The river bank indicates that at certain periods the stream is very much swollen. The current is quite rapid and our boat, by an arrangement of guys and pullies is propelled by the current.

Reached Mankato, understood to contain 3,000 inhabitants. Breakfasted and resumed my seat in the stage and we are off for "Garden city."[6]

[5] The Winnebago Indians occupied a reservation on the Blue Earth River from 1855 to 1863. The village of St. Clair is now located on the site of their agency. Folwell, *Minnesota,* 1: 319 (St. Paul, 1921); Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County,* 60 (Chicago, 1909).

[6] Mankato had 3,482 inhabitants in 1870, according to the census of that year. The Minnesota Stage Company advertised daily stage service from Mankato "For Garden City, Vernon Center, Shelbyville, Winnebago City and Blue Earth City at 8:00 A.M.," in the *Mankato Union* for June 7, 1867.

Crossed Blue Earth river, about one and a half miles beyond Mankato, in another model ferry-boat, arranged on the same plan of the Leseuer boat though greatly superior to that, particularly as to size and appointments, as our entire establishment was taken over in one trip.

The first five miles from Mankato, land is very poor, — soil apparently a kind of black sand. From that point onward land is growing better, some very fine crops as we move onward.

Reach Garden City and stop for dinner, change horses, &c. Location of the place beautiful, lying in a basin shaped valley, with hills about it which do one good to look at, after having seen so much of level country as we have left behind us. Number of inhabitants said to be about 800, and increasing by emigration rapidly. There is one of the best water powers located here, to be found in the State. There are two large flouring mills in the place and more projected. The stream is called by the Indian name of Wattonwan, signifying sparkling water.[7]

There are no expensive buildings in the place, but all are of a neat, tidy character.

Stopped at Vernon Centre, an insignificant place, left the mail and pushed on for Winnebago City. Through this section the roads are fair, except in places where poles have been laid through sluices making a regular corduroy road, to ride over which, in one of these Minnesota stages (or any other for that matter) is enough to shake the daylight out of a delicate individual like myself. Indeed if my neck is not dislocated, or my back broken in one or more places by the time I get through, I shall give more credit to the architect of my frame than I have ever yet done.

Have just seen the second field on which manure has been hauled, since I entered the State. In New York, or any of the

[7] "For thirty years or more, Garden City township was the mill town of our county," writes Hughes in his *Blue Earth County*, 248. He notes that "In the spring of 1868, Garden City Village contained three grist-mills" and he mentions a saw mill established in 1866 and operated for several years thereafter. The census of 1870 credits the village of Garden City with but 368 inhabitants. Watonwan is a Sioux word meaning "I see" or "he sees," according to Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 574 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 17).

Eastern States, this would seem a matter of so common an occurrence as not to be worth mentioning, but in this State these two cases are so widely at variance with the prevailing custom of the farmers here, that I could not avoid the temptation to make a note of it. Almost every large barn I have seen on my route, has a tremendous pile of good manure which the farmers do not seem to know what to do with. I have frequently seen it heaped up around the large doors of the barn, so high that some shoveling must be done before they can be opened. I have sometimes thought (judging from appearances) that perhaps they made it a practice of moving their barns at certain periods, to avoid handling the article. For this conclusion, however, I am not indebted for any information obtained on the spot, but have drawn entirely on my imagination.

Arrived at Winnebago City; a place of 250 inhabitants. To a stranger like myself one would naturally infer from the affix "city" that he was about to enter an incorporated town, but whoever draws such an inference is doomed like myself to disappointment.[8]

Chartered a man to take me out on the prairie about twelve miles to the claim of an old and valued friend who had emigrated from "York," and whom I shall call Z—— for convenience. The whole distance lay through uncultivated prairie, and the general aspect of things was rather gloomy, — much like that of the great ocean as one looks out upon it in the dim twilight of a cloudy evening. Found Z—— attending to his stock when we drove up, whistling away — happy as a lord. Indeed I have long since come to the conclusion that in no section have I ever seen more universal, unadulterated, happiness than that exhibited on these Western prairies.

Spent the entire evening and well into the small hours of the morning in talking over the days of "Old Lang Syne" and the times when we went gipsying.

[8] Winnebago City in Faribault County had a population of 326 in 1870. The word "city" was added to the name to distinguish it from the Winnebago Agency, but this was dropped in 1905 and the village is now known simply as Winnebago. Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 188; J. A. Kiester, *The History of Faribault County*, 523 (Minneapolis, 1896).

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4th.

Rose at six, the sun shining brightly, and taken altogether, a beautiful morning. The feeling of gloom which came over me last evening at the twilight hour, as our horses waded through the sluices and tall grass growing therein, have entirely left me, and as I look out upon this beautiful prairie, I am lost in wonder and admiration of the sight presented to my view. I see the smoke ascending from the settlers' cabins in every direction. The numerous little groves which dot the prairie on every hand, indicating the settler's domicile, tell the story of his industry in a commendable effort to supply by the cunning of his hand that which nature has failed to furnish.

This particular section is known as Pleasant Prairie — a name at once appropriate and pleasing to the ear. The town was organized on March 7, 1866.[9] It is six miles square and is laid out in sections of one mile each. These are sub-divided into quarter sections of 160 acres each, making 144 farms of this size. From this however eight quarter sections are to be deducted for school purposes granted by the government, leaving 136 farms of 160 acres each, open to actual settlers.

These farms have nearly all been taken under the homestead act, and in many cases the claimants have thrown up comfortable dwelling places for their families and shelter for their stock, and have broken from three to thirty acres of prairie with a view of making for themselves a permanent home.

[9] As early as October 24, 1865, the inhabitants of township 102, range 29 W, submitted a petition to the county commissioners of Martin County asking that their township be organized under the name of South Creek. The petition was granted, but the organization does not seem to have been perfected at the time, for on February 20, 1866, the county commissioners received another petition from the people of this township "praying to organize under the name of Pleasant Prairie, the name being suggested by Thomas Nichols, who came from a place in Ontario of that name." This petition was granted and it was ordered that an election of township officers be held at the home of Amison J. Hodgman on March 7, 1866. As the township records begin with this date, it evidently marks the "beginning of corporate existence." Martin County Archives, Fairmont, cited in a letter from Arthur M. Nelson, secretary of the Martin County Historical Society, October 1, 1930.

The first year they can do comparatively nothing so far as realizing any returns from their lands, as the "breaking" needs to lay a year before the fibrous roots are sufficiently decayed to work advantageously. Besides a house of some kind is to be built, a shelter for their stock, is to be got ready, and prairie grass is to be cut, cured and stacked for sustaining the stock through the winter. By the time that all this is accomplished, winter is at hand, and nothing can be done by the settler for the ensuing four months, beyond the ordinary attention to his family and stock which they require. Whoever has been fortunate enough to get a few acres broken the first season, may count upon that number of acres for a crop the season following. The best time for breaking is said to be in the month of June, although there are different opinions as to that, many holding the opinion that the month of August is still better. Not being a judge as to these matters I decline to give an opinion.

The present season has been very wet, and as a natural consequence the settlers have not advanced in breaking and general improvements as they anticipated, nor as their labors warranted.

There is much difficulty experienced in very wet seasons before the breaking is ready for "crossing" as the water in many places lies on the surface of the upturned sod and will not drain off through the thick, leathery substance until decayed and cut in pieces by a thorough crossing. After it has been crossed the whole becomes in substance very much like wood ashes, but of a darker color — much in this respect like muck found in swamps in the Eastern States.

There is no timber in this section to speak of, excepting a small belt here and there around some of the lakes or creeks of which there are several in the town.

One of the first things a settler does, is to plant a small grove of trees about his house, of a variety noted for their rapid growth. These miniature groves are in the language of the settler called "Windbreaks." A person traveling these great sparsely settled prairies of the West can generally discern in the distance the location of every house by its surrounding grove. Cottonwood is the variety selected. The trunks of these trees resemble that of the sassafras, the branches and leaves that of the poplar.

The mode of locating or settling a claim under the homestead act, is something like this: A would-be settler comes into a section where government land is held. He goes over the tract (all of which has been previously surveyed) until he finds a quarter section which suits him in point of location, etc. He then goes to the government land office and requests that his name be entered as a claimant, and if there is no prior claimant, his name is so entered. The expense of this operation is $14. A receipt is taken from the government for the money thus paid, and the settler is at liberty to move on and take possession of the claim. If he fulfills the requirements of the act, in a continuous occupancy of the premises for five years from the date of his receipt, he is entitled to receive a deed from the government, and thereafter he is at liberty to sell, trade or dispose of the property as he deems most to his interest. He has, according to the conditions of his contract with the government, six months grace in which to move on to his claim, but if he fails to do so within that time his claim is liable (in the phrase of the settlers) to be "jumped." That is, in case of failure to comply with the conditions of his contract, any person coming on the tract in search of a quarter section and finding the claim unoccupied, may go to the land office and express a desire to test the validity of the original claimant. On the strength of the application a suit is ordered, on the payment of $5 by the applicant. The matter is then advertised and the parties warned to appear at the land office on a certain day to give evidence in the case. Unless the original claimant can give positive proof that he has not abandoned the claim; that he has been deterred from carrying out his part of the programme by unavoidable occurrences, as that of death or sickness in his family, or something of this kind in which his good faith toward the government is demonstrated, the case is decided against him, and the property allowed to claimant No. 2, who starts anew from that date. If he succeeds in establishing the proof of having acted in good faith he is allowed to retain his claim on the original document.

The first annual town meeting in Pleasant Prairie was held April 3, 1866, upon which occasion thirty-eight votes were polled.

In the month of May, 1867, the number of names registered by the town clerk was eighty-three — showing an increase of over one hundred per cent. in that time.[10]

I learned the cost of breaking prairie land was from $4 to $5 per acre. Three pair of oxen with a sixteen inch breaking plow will break one and a half acres per day. But those who follow the business of breaking by the acre commonly work four pair of oxen and a twenty or twenty-two inch plow, turning over from two to two and a quarter acres per day.[11]

Good horses are worth per pair from $300 to $500; oxen are worth per pair $130 to $200; milch cows are worth per head from $25 to $40; lumber — bass, cotton and elm $24 per thousand, black walnut $34, and oak $30 per thousand. This price includes the expense of hauling from mills 18 miles distant. Butter and cheese are selling from 18c to 20c per pound. Sugar at an average of about 20c per lb. Molasses $1.25 per gallon. Syrup $1.60 per gallon.

Through all the uncultivated prairie lands of Minnesota, I find at certain periods of the day, especially about sunset, the mosquitoes are positively "the greatest plague of life," Nancy Black to the contrary notwithstanding. In passing through the marshes or sluices, so called, a man who has an extra amount of physical ability to wield a whisk-bush in each hand may succeed in passing through alive, but if he is troubled with constitutional weakness he stands a fair chance of being literally "chawed up."

"Smudges," are institutions which should not be omitted in this connection. About sunset on every evening during the mosquitoe season one may see a dense smoke rising from almost every hamlet in sight. A fire is built in front and rear of house and cattle yard, of some dry material, when green grass or weeds

[10] No other information concerning the number of voters in Pleasant Prairie in 1866 and 1867 seems to be available. According to Mr. Nelson's letter of October 1, 1930, "there was very heavy emigration and settlement in that section of the county about that time. It was all homesteaded from 1864 to about 1868."

[11] Other estimates of the amount of breaking that could be done in a day with oxen are included in communications relating to "The Study of Pioneer Life," printed *ante*, 10: 432; 11: 64, 72.

are thrown on and the fire is thus smothered without being extinguished; the object being to create as much smoke as possible. This is called a "smudge," and on the whole proves an admirable arrangement for squelching the pests of the country.

MONDAY, AUGUST 5th.

Spent the day with friend Z——, in discoursing on various subjects pertaining to the country, until late in the afternoon, when he geared up his pair of oxen, good and true, to a good, strong, lumber wagon, filled the same with prairie grass cut for the occasion, got a blanket from the house, placed that on top of whole, jumped on ourselves, bade the folks a reluctant good-bye and started for Winnebago City. The first five miles went first rate, but over the balance of the route was obliged to fight mosquitoes vigorously to prevent them from carrying me off. Allow me to say, parenthetically, in this connection, that although I am not aware of being constituted differently from others of the human race, it is a fact, notwithstanding, that whenever I make my appearance where these pests do most abound, I become at once the centre of attraction, while the balance of the company go scot free, and I go in at once and without ceremony for a regular puncturing.

Reached Winnebago City at 9 p. m., put up at the hotel and went to sleep ruminating on my wanderings.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6th.

In company with friend Z—— looked about the "city," after which got breakfast, and at 10 o'clock, bidding friend Z—— good-bye, took stage for Mankato, on the home stretch.

The excessive heat and a crowded stage had the effect of making the ride an uncomfortable one. Reached Mankato at seven p. m., and put up for the night at the Clifton House — appearance of a good house and chances of a good night's rest in prospect.[12]

[12] The Clifton House was being run by Marcus T. C. and Mark D. Flower during the summer of 1867, according to their advertisement in the *Mankato Union*.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7th.

Rose at 5 1/2 a. m. and took a walk through the place. Had pointed out to me the spot where some two dozen or more Indians had been executed upon a certain day not many years since, for numerous murders committed in the State upon men, women and children, indiscriminately — echo answered as I viewed the spot, "served them right!" [13]

Having an absolute horror of that miserable stage route from Mankato to Owatonna, concluded to take the steamer, via Minnesota river, to Belle Plain[e], thence by the valley Road to St. Paul.[14] In accordance with this decision, took boat at 7 1/2 a. m., and steamed down the river. The Minnesota river in the Eastern States would be considered a mere creek, though the map makers no doubt would class it there as here, a river. Thus far it has the appearance of a large creek swollen by recent rains, but I am told that the water has been much higher — that the water is now falling, indeed, that it has been subsiding for several days past. Its banks are now apparently about ten feet above the water. The current in the bends is quite rapid, but when we enter a short stretch that is comparatively straight, the water does considerable eddying. The stream is full of visible snags but how many there are which are invisible deponent saith not.

The course of the stream cannot be ascertained by consulting any map which has ever fallen under my notice, but if I were compelled to indicate said course, I should draw my will as a preliminary, before entering upon that enterprise.

In order to give some idea of the crookedness of the river one has only to consider that the distance from Mankato to St. Peter, in a straight line is twelve miles, while by water the distance is

[13] Brainerd is referring to the execution of thirty-eight Indians and half-breeds at Mankato on December 27, 1862. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 2: 210 (St. Paul, 1924).

[14] The Minnesota Valley Railroad was "opened to Belle Plaine" in the fall of 1866. The latter place was connected with Mankato by a stage line as well as by boat. Time tables for the railroad service between Belle Plaine and St. Paul appear in the *Saint Peter Tribune* for June 5, and the *Mankato Union* for June 7, 1867.

thirty miles.[15] The water of the river is very much like that of the Mississippi — having a muddy appearance. The shores are covered with timber, with here and there a small clearing. The banks I am told sometimes overflow, thus rendering farming operations unreliable at certain seasons of the year.

St. Peter announced. A store-house near the place of landing, but no wharf. Bow of the boat runs upon the shore, stern swings down stream, they run out their long gang-plank, a-la Mississippi, and proceed to land freight, and wood up. The place I am told contains some 2,000 inhabitants.[16]

Ottawa announced. But three or four buildings in sight. Am told that there are fine prairie lands east of this point but they are invisible from my present stand point. River and shores much as previously described. Stopped at a place with no name so far as I can learn, for the purpose of wooding up — took on four cords. While doing this made the acquaintance of a pet lamb which I learned belonged on board. He scrambled up the river bank and ran out to a field of grass in sight where he made haste to fill himself and returned to the boat just in time to save his "mutton." I am told that sometimes when he is very hungry he forgets himself and eats a little too long, but a slight puff from the steam whistle will bring him scampering to the boat, and not unfrequently he is obliged to make a tremendous leap to reach the deck.

Reached Laseuer [Le Sueur], a thriving little village by the river bank, said to be the point which will be reached by the Valley railroad this fall.[17]

Nothing of interest until we reach the point to which the Valley

[15] Brainerd's estimate of the distance between Mankato and St. Peter "in a straight line" is approximately correct; that by water, however, is less than twenty miles.

[16] The population of St. Peter was 2,124 in 1870.

[17] Train service to Le Sueur on the Minnesota Valley Railroad is not advertised until the summer of 1868. See *Mankato Union,* July 24, and *Saint Peter Tribune,* June 3, 1868. A statement that the road "reached Le Sueur in 1867," however, appears in William G. Gresham, *History of Nicollet and LeSueur Counties,* 541 (Indianapolis, 1916).

road is completed. The station is called Beaver. There is no depot erected, but there undoubtedly will be at some future time.[18]

From Beaver station we got off at length for St. Paul, by the Valley road. Nothing on the road which I could discover worthy of note except "Ft. Snelling" which is located at the junction of the Mississippi and the Minnesota rivers. The Fort stands upon high ground and seems from the hasty glance which I get of it, as we go whirling on, to be built of stone. I am told that it is now garrisoned by one company of United States troops.[19]

From Mendota to St. Paul, in building the Valley road, a deep cut has been made for several miles. On the south and easterly side a tremendous bank of sand stone exists; at some places its height being I should judge from 30 to 60 feet. It is so soft that a person taking a small fracture in the hand may crush it to the consistency of beach sand.

Reached St. Paul at 7:20 p.m. Much to my regret, my limited time forbids stopping, and I find that I must forego the pleasure I anticipated in viewing the falls of St. Anthony, Minneapolis, St. Paul and its vicinity.

A brisk walk of some fifteen minutes brought me to the steamer Milwaukee, bound for La-Crosse and other landings above and below that place.[20] They were ringing the last peal of the last

[18] Contemporary newspaper advertisements indicate that the Minnesota Valley road terminated at Belle Plaine during the summer of 1867, as is implied by Brainerd, *ante*, p. 59. Beaver was a town on the Minnesota River in Scott County. Minnesota, *Laws*, 1857, p. 296.

[19] The "field and staff" of Company D of the Tenth United States Infantry was stationed at Fort Snelling in the summer of 1867. The commandant was Colonel E. B. Alexander. Fort Snelling Archives, Round Tower, Fort Snelling; Richard W. Johnson, "Fort Snelling from its Foundation to the Present Time," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 8: 445.

[20] The "Milwaukee" was a large side-wheel steamboat, 240 feet long, with a 33 foot beam, and of 550 tons burden. It was built at Cincinnati during the winter of 1856 and was put into service on the Mississippi between St. Paul and Prairie du Chien in the spring of 1857 under the command of Captain Stephen Hewitt. George B. Merrick, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*, 120, 280 (Cleveland, 1909).

bell when I reached the deck and in a few moments we were steaming down the river. The crowd of passengers was great, and in consequence I could get no state-room, but would have at the proper time (I was informed) a cot made up in the saloon, on which to rest my weary bones. The moon was shining brightly and the sail down river was extremely pleasant. We made an occasional landing, and the operation of turning round and bringing the boat up river at every landing was quite interesting to me, "a looker on in Venice," but on one or two occasions not seeing the operation when it commenced, I, like the steamer, was turned round and until I got my bearings from moon, stars, etc., I was going up stream in spite of myself. About 10 p. m., the band belonging to the steamer, made up from the colored waiters, took their seats upon a temporary raised platform in the large saloon, and having got their instruments in order, two sets were formed and dancing commenced in right good earnest, and for two full hours this was kept up without an intermission of more than five minutes at any one time. Not being a judge of such matters I am unable to pronounce upon the merits of the performance, but I may say *this* that some of the passengers made a fine appearance, while others appeared like the veriest simpletons. However I was content with viewing the scenery as we moved down the river and looked in only occasionally at the dancers as they went swinging round the circle.

Midnight, retired for the night on my promised cot.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8th.

Rose at 5 a. m. Went on deck and found our boat lying at a place called Wabashaw. Deck hands were discharging a large quantity of hoop poles. The place does not appear to amount to much, viewing it from the boat. How much of it lies beyond the ridge I have no means of knowing. Land the mail at Alma, a place of perhaps three or four hundred inhabitants.[21] Directly back of the place a chain of hills rise to a great height, reminding

[21] This settlement on the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi had 565 inhabitants in 1870. Wabasha, on the Minnesota shore, boasted a population of 1,739 in the same year.

one of the highlands on the Hudson. Indeed we occasionally pass as we move down the river some splendid mountain scenery such as I was not prepared to see here, as my impressions were at variance with the facts as found to exist.

A fine breeze is blowing from the south and every thing seems propitious for a pleasant sail to LaCrosse — distance said to be eighty-five miles. Whole distance from St. Paul to La-Crosse set down on my ticket as two hundred and eighty miles.[22]

Arrived at Fountain City, a very pretty place of, I should judge, 2,000 inhabitants.[23] Directly back of the place are two hills, the summits of which are some two hundred feet above the water. The settlement nestled away at the base of these two majestic hills, the river which at this point has every appearance of a lake interspersed with numerous islands, would together form one of the most magnificent subjects for a painter which I ever looked upon.

Winona announced. More of those magnificent hills on both sides of the river.

Stop at Homer, a small place on the west bank of the river. Like mostly all the landings noted, lies at the base of tremendous hills — should judge the place contained some 500 inhabitants.[24]

Arrived at La Crosse. Got dinner at the depot and learned to my disgust, that my train would not leave till 8 p. m. Upon receiving this bit of information I was strongly tempted to "say a swear," and had it not been against my principles should have done so.

La Crosse I am told has some 10,000 inhabitants.[25] The place proper lies I am informed about a mile from the depot, but I am not sufficiently interested to walk that distance under this broiling sun for the purpose of seeing it.

[22] These distances are somewhat exaggerated. According to the government survey of 1880 the distance between Alma and La Crosse was 61 miles and that between St. Paul and La Crosse 157 miles. Merrick, *Upper Mississippi*, 297.

[23] The population of Fountain City, Wisconsin, was 867 in 1870.

[24] Homer, a settlement near Winona, had only 91 inhabitants in 1870.

[25] In 1870 La Crosse had a population of 7,785.

I notice one peculiarity about the depot which I have seen at no other place, viz: the large number of negroes alias "contrabands." They are lying about in the sun, the perspiration streaming down their faces, apparently without sufficient life to get into the shade. I counted at one time since I arrived twenty-seven of these poor, miserable creatures in a pile basking in the hot sun, seemingly, without care or anxiety as to how they are to get on in the future; ragged and filthy to an extreme, and how they will ultimately sustain themselves God only knows.

Left by train for Columbus, feeling greatly disappointed at being obliged to pass the same ground in the night a second time, as I had arranged to pass by day, and which I should have accomplished but for the unfortunate failure to connect with the morning train.

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