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HENRY MARTYN NICHOLS AND THE NORTHAMPTON COLONY¹

"BRO. F. NUTTING spent the night with us talking about Minnesota shall make arrangements to go." With these words, written in his diary on September 14, 1852, my grandfather, Henry M. Nichols, brought to an end nearly six years of what he called "a tight squeeze to live," and set his face toward the freer life of a Minnesota pioneer.² On November 14 he preached his farewell sermon in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, and on the sixteenth began his journey to St. Paul.

After three years of teaching country schools in his native Connecticut, he had entered Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1844, to prepare for the ministry. He was then twenty years old. Two years later he chose Oberlin as his college, and in a spirit of high enthusiasm made his first westward journey. He carried with him a recommendation from his principal, Robert Allyn, written beneath a letterhead engraving of the Wilbraham campus, and, as his packet boat moved along on the Erie Canal between Rochester and Buffalo at the rate of five miles an hour, he must have taken the paper from his pocket many times to read over again the following words:

The bearer, Henry Martyn Nichols of Huntington, Conn., has been for two years a student in the Wesleyan Academy. . . . He has stud-

¹The present article deals with Nichols' experiences during his first year in Minnesota, 1852-53. A second article, describing his career from 1853 to 1860, will appear in a future issue of this magazine. *Ed.*

²The diaries and family papers upon which this article is based have been presented to the Minnesota Historical Society by the writer.

ied in a thorough manner the Latin of Sallust, Virgil, and Cicero; and the Greek Reader, so as to be considered qualified to enter any of our Colleges. He is cheerfully recommended to the Faculty of any Institution where he may offer himself for admission as a young man of studious habits, correct morals, and uniform integrity—one in short who will merit their approbation and esteem.

But after only two days at Oberlin, Henry Nichols made up his mind that “the advantages over other institutions do not appear so very great after all.” He was disappointed in the situation of the small village; in the college buildings, all but one of which were built of wood; in the rooms, which looked “like hard places to live in, far worse than our Wilbraham rooms”; in the water, which was “altogether undrinkable”; and in the spirit of the students, which expressed the sentiment, “We are the people.” In other words, he was homesick. He found, moreover, and this was no doubt his deciding point, that he could not “procure employment at least for the first year.”

His return to Massachusetts in the fall of 1846, with “not a cent of money in this wide world” and with his dream of college a little dim, furnished one of his classmates, who did not agree with his ideas concerning Oberlin, with proof not so much of his wisdom as of the strength of his affection, for Henry Nichols found a district school in Belchertown only three miles from the home of Miss Nancy Sikes, a beloved schoolmate of his Wilbraham days. In May, 1847, the Methodist conference made him a local preacher in the village of Southampton, and in September, Henry and Nancy were married.

The next five years were years of struggle. He was received into the conference on trial and appointed to West Springfield in 1848. There was little money for ministers in those days, and one of his stewards told him that he must live on faith. “I told him,” Nichols wrote in his diary, “I must have crackers too; faith without works was dead.” Early in 1849 he made up his mind to go to Virginia and

teach school with a Wilbraham classmate until he could get out of debt, but the plan fell through. Just before the spring conference, his stewards owed him seventy-eight dollars. "Very doubtful if I get the whole," he wrote. "They make me give credit for everything I have received, even a handful of dried apples. Lord pity the preacher here next year."

At the conference, presided over by Bishop Leonidas L. Hamline, Nichols passed his examination and was assigned to North Amherst. "Oh misery," he wrote, "it is a small outside appointment. Nancy feels dreadfully, though she tries hard to laugh and cheer me up." He soon discovered that the North Amherst church had raised only a hundred and thirty dollars for preaching. "My stars," he exclaimed, "I cannot stand it, I shall bolt. I cannot starve to death until my debts are paid. I shall go to Amherst and preach tomorrow, and tell the people that unless they pony up, I can't stay." After church that Sunday members of the congregation pledged three hundred dollars for his support, and he remained there two years. It was in Amherst that he began to preach the fiery antislavery sermons that became typical of his later work in Minnesota.

It was also in Amherst that he taught, during his first year, a select school of twenty-three pupils. "It will be hard," he wrote, "to be in school all day, attend class meetings almost every evening, and preach three times on the Sabbath. But I must do that or starve. My salary won't support me." A little later he recorded: "I am thinking very much of Oregon and California; perhaps it will be my field of labor another year. There is now a great demand for missionaries in that section." And he actually began to study Spanish "to prepare for residence in California." He also wrote to his classmate Joseph A. Russell in Virginia, who was preparing for the Episcopal ministry and who later joined him in Stillwater as rector of

the Episcopal church there, asking for information about becoming an Episcopalian. One day he dined with "Bro. Bardwell of Pelham," and wrote in his diary, "he is as badly off as we are, as to support. *I'll be an Episcopalian.*"

In the spring conference of 1851, which Nichols attended in Boston, for he had been studying for dear life to pass more theological examinations, he was assigned to Williamsburg, eight miles from Northampton, where he "did not wish to go." And to Williamsburg he was returned the following year. He had packed up all his goods, as usual, before going to the conference, and had to look around for another house when he returned. Two years later, writing from Stillwater to his wife's sister in Massachusetts, he said: "I cannot in sincerity respond to your wish that we were in the New England Conference. I do not know but I might have received a 'first-class appointment,' but what constitutes one? There is not one of them where the Minister does not have a tight squeeze to live."

In the fall of 1852 Minnesota was much in my grandfather's thoughts. He had been receiving letters and papers from the territory since his sister, Harriett S. Nichols, had gone out from Mount Holyoke Seminary in the fall of 1851.³ And now, in Northampton, plans were being made for a colony of Connecticut Valley people to migrate to Minnesota to take up claims. During a busy autumn of addressing Free-Soil and Free Democratic conventions and antislavery meetings, which ended in his voting for John P. Hale for president on November 2, 1852, Nichols was equally concerned with the affairs of the colony, as his diary shows:

³ Harriett Nichols was teaching in the Belle Prairie Seminary, established for Chippewa children by the Reverend Frederic Ayer. A letter dated May 30, 1853, in which she gives a detailed account of this school, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The letter is addressed to the Newburyport Sewing Society.

October 6. . . . Attended a preparation meeting for Minnesota.

October 16. Went into Northampton to attend Minnesota meeting. formed an association. chose Nichols Pres. and F. Nutting Sec.

October 19. . . . Attended meeting of Finance Com. of Minnesota Ass. in Northampton. . . .

October 28. attended Minnesota meeting. . . .

November 4. Went to Northampton saw Elder Baker gave his consent for me to go to Minnesota this fall.⁴

On November 12 he took his wife and small son to her father's house in Belchertown, "not expecting to see her for four months." Actually it was over five. On November 16, as president and advance agent of the colony, he started west from Springfield, journeying to Galena by train, lake boat, and stage. His trip to St. Paul is worth following in his own words:

November 22. Started for St Paul 2 P.M. in company with H. B. Stoll in a cutter with one horse. drove 16 miles and put up at M. Lukey's tavern.

November 23. Drove on through Platteville & Lancaster. put up at Pikes private house in Patch Grove. distance 38 miles

November 24. A snow storm. started however at 2 P.M. and drove on to Prairie Du Chien distance 16 miles put up at Phenix House.

November 25. Horse lame, cannot go on sold him. Thanksgiving day grand dinner. At 2 oclock started in Express for St Paul. . . .

November 26. rode all night, 84 miles from starting, and on all day. today 45 further. put up at Merrills.

November 27. On again 55 miles passed only 1 house & that a station stopped at Chippewa River.

November 28. remain here to day will not travel Sundays the stage goes on. nothing to read but a couple of old Universalist papers. . . .

⁴In this and later quotations from Nichols' diaries, pertinent entries only are presented, and the omission of one or more complete entries is indicated only by the omission of a date. Each entry has been treated as a unit, and paragraphing within a single entry has been disregarded. The spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the originals have been retained. In the diaries, the month, day of the week, date, and year appear in print.

November 29. No stage to day nothing to do, but to wait. reading in Patent Office Report on Agriculture. . . .

November 30. waiting all day, but no stage. Oh what dull work. nothing to read but Patent Office Reports. . . . roll swiftly on ye wheels of time.

December 1. At ten oclock the stage came along, a joyful sight. started on. rode 55 miles and at 11½ oclock put up at Rush river. . . . rain and thaw coming on.

December 2. raining and thawing arrived at St Paul at 8 oclock in evening. thick fog, could see nothing. put up at Central House. . . .

Through the rest of December there was little for Nichols to do but attend preaching, beginning on his first Sunday in Minnesota with that of the Reverend Edward D. Neill. Apparently there was preaching nearly every evening of the week as well, for only on Tuesday evening, December 14, when he was initiated into the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 4, did Nichols fail to hear some preacher. On the following Friday evening the sermon was by the Reverend Charles Seccombe of St. Anthony, and a man with delirium tremens interrupted the meeting. Wednesday, December 22, was Thanksgiving Day for the territory, but it seemed little like it to our New Englander. His conscience troubled him, since for once he was idle. "Feel that the Lord is lashing me somewhat for neglect of duty." He called on Neill to ask his advice about preaching, and Neill advised him not to give it up.⁵

St. Paul was full of Indians at this time, but they were not impressive. In a letter to Massachusetts on December 30, 1852, Nichols expresses his disappointment at their appearance:

You would most assuredly be amused if not interested in viewing the hosts of Indians that have thronged our streets for a few weeks past. The payment had just taken place, they had plenty of money, and were making preparations to go off on their winter hunt. They are some of them very richly clad, and some of them very poorly, but

⁵ The first sermon preached by Nichols in Minnesota was in Neill's church on February 13, 1853.

all of them, extremely filthy. I have seen but two or three *good* looking Indians, among the hundreds I have seen, indeed I cannot imagine where the idea originated of the nobility and bravery of the Indian race.

I was in company sometime since with "Little Six" chief of one of the Sioux or Dacotah bands. He is a very pleasant interesting looking personage, as pleasant and good looking a countenance as I have seen among them. They cannot talk English and such jabbering as we have in our streets sometimes, would make even a sick woman smile. We have English, French, German, Swede, Sioux & Chipewewa. There is a German Methodist Church and services in the German language, and in the Catholic Church the services are in the French language.

Later he visited Kaposia, an Indian village and mission station "six miles down the river" from St. Paul, and went into a tepee and smoked a pipe of peace.

In January two members of the Northampton Colony arrived, the Reverend F. Nutting and his brother Levi, after being thirty days on the way. Soon after Nichols wrote in his diary: "Had some conversation with Bro. Nutting, about the location for our colony, and with the knowledge we have at present, we are both in favor of a place above rather than below St. Paul." In February Colonel John H. Stevens called, and invited the colony to locate on Lake Minnetonka. Nutting visited the lake, and returned enchanted. He and his companions decided to go out to Minnetonka and make maple sugar. This bit of pioneering I shall let my grandfather describe:

February 23. . . . L. Nutting, J. Burton & myself went to the falls and procured our outfit for the sugar camp. F. Nutting was not well enough to come to day.

February 24. staid at St. Charles last night by the hospitality of Judge Meeker, and in company with him and Col. J. H. Stevens, went to Minnetonka, explored around, and lodged in Morgan's shanty.

February 25. Went on into the Big Lake explored around most of the day and put up for the night at Garrison's house on the north east end of the Lake.

February 26. After much trouble and delay, at length fixed upon

our location, and by hard work put up a shanty 16 ft. square, and made out to stay in it through the night.

February 27. Here in the forest on the shore of the lake, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the nearest neighbor, and our own shanty but half finished What a Sunday. boards wet, ground damp. however, read a Sermon.

February 28. at work all day fixing the shanty. not fully completed by night either. I have to learn more of the mysteries of cooking.

March 1. To day finished the work on the shanty. find we shall have a very comfortable residence. split log floor, table set with tin dishes.

March 2. F. Nutting arrived from St. Paul. brought a nice mail. . . . a rich time here in the woods.

March 3. Had some conversation about the permanency of our location. We are not satisfied with this as our home. too much timber no prairie. . . .

March 4. We conclude to send to Rum river and make our claim at once, and depart as soon as the sugar season is over. Have commenced making troughs, and preparing for the sugar.

March 5. A Massachusetts man Mr. Dunbar of So. Hadley Falls, arrived at our camp with news, and our St Paul mail. . . . 50 persons start the 6th of Apr.

March 6. Another sunday in the woods. rather more comfortable than a week ago. read another sermon on the Lord's Prayer. our nearest neighbors 3 miles distant, called.

March 7. . . . have had a lame back. strained myself Saturday in burning the troughs.

March 8. F. Nutting & Mr. Dunbar started for Rum river to make explorations and make claims. . . .

March 9. . . . Burned a few troughs and tried to secure a little game. Failed in all but one little squirrel.

March 10. Heard some wild beast around our cabin last night, gnawing the bones we had thrown out. our guns were not charged for large game so we lay still. . . .

March 11. About midnight last night heard the "varmint" around again. our guns were all double shotted. we went out around the cabin, but could see nothing. Came in, and when all was still, heard it again, and then we saw a *mouse*.

March 12. . . . Expected Nutting & Dunbar back, but they did not come.

March 13. a clear and beautiful Sunday. read two sermons from Williams on the Lords Prayer, and the day passed quite pleasantly and I hope profitably.

March 14. Quite anxious to hear from Rum river, but the explorers come not.

March 15. F. Nutting arrived with mail. . . . Report from Rum river is discouraging as far as the prospects of the Colony are concerned

March 16. We are almost discouraged about selecting a good place for the Colony. there are so many speculators, and land pirates.

March 17. There is no chance of doing anything in the way of explorations until the snow is gone. We are watched on every side by speculators.

March 18. Our company of friends start from Mass. the sixth of next month. I must content myself as well as possible until that time.

March 19. It is evident we shall only make enough here in the sugar business to pay expenses, but the practical knowledge of pioneer life is worth very much.

March 20. Rev. Dr. Williams of New York City preached to us two Lectures on the Lords Prayer, which were listened to with much interest by our congregation of four.

March 21. Had some troughs drawn around, and some trees tapped. Got pretty completely tired out. Suffering some, from a lame back.

March 22. Mr. Dunbar came back to spend a little while with us, and brought a mail . . .

March 23. Got a horse of our own to use, and now commences our regular work, tapping trees & gathering sap. . . . Dunbar takes hold like a good fellow, to help.

March 24. Sugared off a little on a small scale just to have a little to eat. had good success, and filled our stomachs pretty thoroughly.

March 25. . . . A drizzling rain and a little snow.

March 26. Yesterday's snow was a regular sap snow, today the sap spouts merrily. Keep the vats boiling till 12 oclock at night. There is some work in this sugar making fun.

March 27. Did not seem much like Sunday to day. . . . Had no sermons read. L. Nutting & Dunbar went a fishing, and commenced boiling before sundown.

March 28. Felt somewhat hurt at the procedure last night. protested strongly but to no purpose. If the Sabbath cannot be observed hereafter, I shall certainly leave the company at once.

March 29. Warm spring weather is coming on fast. The snow disappears as by magic, and the sap season is nearly over also for which I am not sorry.

March 30. Took a long tramp with Burton after ducks but the Indians are ahead of us. no sap running to day, no frost at night.

March 31. Took a little exploring expedition with Dunbar. The snow however is too deep to get back far in the timber.

April 1. In company with Dunbar, left the camp for St. Paul.

Took dinner at Steven's mill. Mr. Tuttle accompanied us out some 10 miles to view the country. found a splendid section.

April 2. With many side steps to see the country, came on to St. Anthony Falls. dined with Tuttle, and walked on to St. Paul. Saw a beautiful location on Cedar Island Lake. wish I could get it.

April 6. To day at 11 oclock A.M my dear family start from Springfield Mass. for Minnesota. May the good Lord watch over them and preserve them from all harm & danger.

April 11. . . . first steamboat of the season "West Newton" came in at day-light, bringing the largest mail ever brought to St. Paul. . . .

April 12. Went to St. Anthony in stage, and in afternoon walked out to Lake Calhoun, to see a claim. Came back to St Anthony, foot sore & weary and partook of the hospitality of J. W. North Esq.

April 13. A tremendous snow storm raging. no stage to St. Paul, and in the raging storm, I walked from the Falls down to St. Paul. A hard time, but I toughed it through.

April 14. Sun comes out warm and the snow is fast passing away. Steam Boat "Mary C." arrived from below, with my freight. charges on it 54 doll[ar]s. now what is to be done?

For the next three days my grandfather was "watching, watching for wife to come." He lay awake every night waiting to hear a steamboat whistle. There was nothing to do but wait for the colonists. In the meantime he had sent a notice of their expected coming to the papers, and the *St. Anthony Express* of April 15, 1853, printed the following item:

Rev. H. M. Nichols, President of the Northampton Colony, informs us that fifty persons belonging to that Colony are expected to arrive to-day. This Colony, Mr. Nichols thinks, will not probably all settle in the same vicinity, but will choose their locations according to their individual tastes.

Messrs. Nichols and Nutting . . . have both been spending some weeks at Minnetonka, and seem well pleased with the locality.

A few days later Nichols noted that most of the colonists had arrived:

April 19. Last night about 1 oclock some 75 of the Colony came to hand safely, but Oh dear, for me, my dear wife & family were not with them. They *kept* the Sabbath in Galena, rather than on the Boat.

April 20. This afternoon at about 2 oclock between 60 & 70 of

our company started for the Cannon river. All in high spirits and full of glee.

April 21. . . . Shall go down to the wharf boat and sleep tonight, waiting for wife.

April 22. Sure enough at 11½ oclock last night the S.B. Dr. Franklin came in, and I found my dear wife on board. . . .

In a letter home my grandmother gives a graphic description of the journey from Rockford to Galena in a "mud wagon," which was so high that she had to have a chair to help her step on the hub:

From the hub we climbed to the top of the wheel, and from there we clambered in. I thought surely we would not get much higher if we were in the moon. I wondered of what use it was to build such carts as that but soon learned. It was covered with cloth, no springs, and fifteen jammed inside. I cannot give you any idea of that ride, the wheels rolled in mud to the hub all of the time, six large strong horses to draw and *never* got out of a walk. Often the wheels would go down on one side so far that the wheels would rise on the other. The driver would instantly stop call to the men to get out carefully on the upper side and part of them hold that down while others pried up the other side. We started at two and at eight had got twelve miles where we put up at one of those *beautiful* places that Mr Nichols so *truly* discribed. . . .⁶

We slept as we could till morning and as soon as light started for the next station twelve miles [away], where we were to take breakfast. We had gone two miles when we came to two slough[s] about a rod apart where a stage and four horses were fast in the mud, had been there since nine oclock the evening before. They had just succeeded in extricating two of the horses. . . . They had got six yoke of oxen there to get the stage out, and they were prying up the horses!! . . .

We went around three miles and avoided those deep slough[s]. Expected when we started from Rockford Wednesday that Thursday night we should be in Galena, but at eleven we had only gone twelve miles, where we stopped and took breakfast, changed horses and started again. Changed horses again at six and took supper, and started to travel all night. We change[d] drivers as well as horses every twelve miles and we had now got a desperate character for one. I never suffered so much through fear as I did that twelve miles. The

⁶ Nichols usually referred to them as "rum holes." The letters written by Mrs. Nichols have been paragraphed by the author, who has also supplied capitalization at the beginnings of sentences, and such punctuation as is needed for clearness.

men would have to get out every rod or two in the mud over their knees and pry out. . . .

We got to another station at one oclock & I was so completely worn out that I told them I would not stir *another inch* that night. The other Ladies felt as I did, and many of the Gentlemen but the new driver insisted upon our going, said he should go & leave us if we did not get in again. I asked the bar keeper if I could have a bed. He said the floors and beds of every room were so full that there was not room for a child anywhere, neither could we get a bedquilt or any thing else in the shape of covering. Mrs Nutting and myself laid ourselves down on the soft mud on the barroom floor, saying we would not stir for any body, if the rest wanted to go and leave us they might in welcome, for we had said *we should'nt and we sha'nt go one inch farther!* I went to sleep leaving the driver cursing & swearing at a most furious rate and the rest in consultation. Awoke at daylight almost frozen and quite stiff, having given my feet for a pillow to Henry. . . . Found them all waiting for us in the morning. Asked the Landlord what there was to pay for my lodging. Said he thought he would not charge me any thing. The men kept from freezing by walking about after burning all the wood they could find. . . .

Arrived in Galena at dark Friday. Staid there till Monday Eve when we started for St Paul in the boat Dr Franklin.⁷ Had one of the richest finest rides that we ever enjoyed. Got into St Paul Thursday night at twelve oclock. We did not expect to get into Port, until daylight, so I had gone to bed and was sleeping quietly, when I was awakened by some one kissing me, and starting up in a fright I was clasped to my Husband's arms.

With the Northampton Colony had come my grandmother's sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Arba Cleaveland, and their two small daughters, and one other family from Belchertown. Leaving the women and children in St. Paul, Nichols, Cleaveland, and five other men started on April 25 on an exploring trip to Lake Minnetonka to look up claims.⁸ The diary of the excursion reads as follows:

⁷ In the diary that she kept for her husband during their separation, Mrs. Nichols wrote that she cried for two hours on Saturday night when the rest of the company went up the river by boat, but that she could not go conscientiously.

⁸ The women, left in St. Paul, saw a party of Chippewa dressed for war try to kill a Sioux on April 27. Mrs. Cleaveland wrote: "They ran past me but a few feet from where I stood, yelling their hideous war-

April 25. Started with six others, to visit the region around Lake Minnetonka. Went on, as far as Steven's mill, and put up for the night. . . .

April 26. Started in two boats, with Simon Steven's for a pilot. passed up the creek into the lake, and up to the narrows at the entrance of the Big Lake, where we camped for the night in the open air.

April 27. Started early, and went back 3 or four miles, from the Lake. Found a splendid section of country, that pleased our whole company well. Came back to Steven's mill to spend the night.

April 28. Walked from the mill to St. Anthony, and got a ride to St. Paul. . . .

As a result of this trip some members of the Northampton Colony, including the Belchertown men, Cleaveland and Powers, made locations, much to the delight of the *St. Anthony Express*, which said their heads were right. At the suggestion of Nichols they called the community "Chanhassen." That, however, is a separate story.⁹

On May 10, 1853, my grandfather signed an agreement with W. A. Cheever, according to the terms of which Cheever leased his house in St. Anthony (lot 7, block 23) for six dollars a month, and "twenty acres of land in said City known as his farm" for a hundred and twenty dollars. For his experiment at combining farming and missionary work Nichols chose St. Anthony as a central location. In a letter to Belchertown, written on August 5, 1853, he gives an account of his twofold enterprise:

I can remember when I was a "wee bit toddling thing" how Father & Mother used to pray that I might become a Missionary, and how they told me I was named after a great and good man, and they hoped I would do as much good as Henry Martyn. Well, I am in the Missionary work, most decidedly. . . . I am an Agent & Home Missionary of the "Western Home and Foreign Missionary Association" which is an un-sectarian, evangelical, Anti Slavery Missionary Society established at Cincinnati O. in 1850. I am also an Agent of the

hoop, and fired into a store where sat an old chief, & squaw, they hit her, tore her arm most shockingly, then started to get the scalp, but finding it was a squaw did not want it. . . . The United States troops pursued them."

⁹ The writer has prepared a special article on the Chanhassen colony.

American Reform Tract and Book Society. . . . For both these agencies my field is the whole of Minnesota Territory.¹⁰

My business as defined in my commission, is to collect funds as I can for the Societies, to organize Free Churches, and preach as I am able whenever openings present. . . . I do not know that I ever felt so much the importance of the Ministerial work as since I have seen the work to be done in Minnesota.

In an earlier letter of June 8, 1853, Nichols described his new surroundings:

We are one mile from the village of St. Anthony Falls, which contains 1500 inhabitants. This part of the town where we live, is at the steamboat landing, has been laid off into city lots, and called "St. Anthony City." No doubt in time it will be quite a city. . . .

We have 20 acres of land that we have hired this year, that has been cultivated two or three years, and is mellow and in good condition. We have planted a bushel of corn, 23 bushels of oats, 15 bushels of potatoes [and] 1 bush[el] of wheat. . . . This work has kept us pretty busy for several weeks. We purchased a yoke of oxen a noble pair for 125 doll[ar]s, with which we have done all the ploughing.¹¹ This land is not as good as that at Minnetonka, but I think will give better crops than New England land. We have most beautiful sport fishing in the Mississippi, close at our doors. Pike, pickerel, bass, catfish, sunfish &c. in great quantities, pickerel 12 lbs each, catfish 20 and 30 each, are caught here every day. To day while Nancy was getting dinner ready, I went down to the river and caught a catfish and a pickerel, more than we can eat at one meal.

The prairies around here are covered with strawberry vines, which will furnish us with the ripe fruit by the bushel by the first of next month. Then for other fruit we have plenty of raspberries, blackberries, whortleberries, gooseberries, black currants, crab apples, frost grapes, and in many parts cranberries, all these grow wild every where.

My grandmother, in a letter home in which she speaks of walking a mile to church every Sabbath forenoon, and of

¹⁰ Similar accounts of Nichols' missionary commission appear in the *Minnesota Democrat* (St. Paul) for May 11, the *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul) for May 12, and the *St. Anthony Express* for May 13, 1853. Numerous letters written by Nichols from Minnesota are to be found among the archives of the American Home Missionary Society in the Chicago Theological Seminary. Copies on film slides are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹¹ Nichols walked five miles up the river to look at the oxen on May 17.

jumping for joy over the first dandelion, it was so homelike, gives a vivid account of their situation :

We are situated a little way out of St. Anthony on the bank of the Mississippi River on a high bluff of eighty feet. A step or two down the bluff is our spring . . . constantly pouring out of the rock. A few steps from this and we stand upon a precipice overhanging the water. We go down the river a few rods [and] we can dip our feet in the waters. . . . Every time I look from my window I'm lost in wonder, love, and praise. . . . The falls go leaping, plunging, boiling, roaring until the very air echoes. . . .

There is the greatest immigration to this Territory that there has ever been known. They are coming in constantly by hundreds, every Steam boat is filled to overflowing with settlers for the Territory, mostly from the eastern states, some from Michigan, Wisconsin and those States where the Fever & Ague prevail. The Society here is principally from Maine, as much refinement [and] intelligence as we can find at the East in the same number of inhabitants. . . . St Anthony is far superior to St Paul in the beauty of its scenery and in the intelligence and refinement of its inhabitants. The first class in St P is very Superior, but in the lower classes it is other-wise.

In the meantime Nichols was neatly combining agricultural and religious labors. He records on a Saturday in May that he "worked till most night and then walked down to St. Paul," where he preached in Neill's church on Sunday. But he "extemporized and tired out the people." On June 1 he finished planting corn and "sold two dollars worth of books for Tract Society." On the twentieth he started on a long-anticipated missionary trip up the river.

June 20. . . . Left St. Anthony in S. B. Gov. Ramsey at 3 oclock. Passed a large camp of Winnebago's after dark.

June 21. . . . Scenery, somewhat monotonous, but some beautiful land on the river. Arrived at Sauk Rapids landing about 7 oclock in a hard thunder shower. Remain on the boat over night.

June 23. . . . Had some conversation about forming a church at this point.

June 24. conclude to remain here until after the Sabbath. Every thing however seems very dull and monotonous. . . .

June 25. . . . Went up to Watab, to Mr. Gilman's. . . .

June 26. Preached in Mr. Gilman's dining room at 10 oclock. . . . then walked down to Sauk Rapids and preached in Mr. Russells dining room at 3 oclock. . . .

June 28. . . . went a fishing. Had fine sport, caught about 10 lbs. Was turned out of the canoe into the rapids, and had a high time in getting the canoe back.

June 29. at 8 oclock left in the S. B. Gov. Ramsey for St. Anthony. Had a very pleasant ride down the river. . . .

June 30. And now I doff the ministerial and assume the agricultural. . . .

July 18. Preachers meeting at my house. Steam boat Hindoo arrived at St Anthony City. great excitement around our quiet place.

July 23. Walked up to Anoka, 17 miles. enjoy the hospitality of Father Twichell

July 24. Preached at Father Twichell's. . . .

July 29. Congregational ministers of Minnesota met and formed an Association. . . .

The *Express* of August 6, 1853, gives a full account, written by my grandfather, of this historic convention. Sherman Hall was moderator, and H. M. Nichols, scribe. A constitution was adopted, the first article of which read, "This Association shall be called The Congregational Association of Minnesota." The original members were Sherman Hall of Crow Wing, Richard Hall of Point Douglas, Charles Seccombe and H. M. Nichols of St. Anthony, Royall Twichell of Rum River, and Charles Galpin of Lake Minnetonka.¹²

The summer of 1853 passed, divided between preaching and farming. The preaching was more successful than the farming. "I have more farming business on hand than I like," my grandfather wrote. "It takes up too much of my time. I relish the Missionary work; there is a sort of romance in being the first on the ground to preach a Gospel sermon, and to organize the first church in a place, which

¹² Seccombe called the association the "first Congregational body ever organized in Minnesota." The meeting of 1854 was held at Excelsior on July 27, with Galpin as moderator and Nichols, scribe. Although Nichols was a member of the Presbytery in 1856, he went from Stillwater to St. Anthony on October 24 to attend the conference of Congregational churches, writing in his diary: "Glad to find they are so well organized. Wish I was still among them."

will give the leading character to the place and continue to exert its influence till the end of time."

Disaster finally overtook the farming. On August 18 Nichols wrote in his diary, "drove out 36 head of cattle from my corn field." My grandmother's account, written on September 24, tells the whole story:

We are poor as Jobs cat now, and are like to be poorer before we get through. You see we have got into the hands of a sharper, and I guess it will strip us effectually. We hired twenty acres of land in the spring, paying six dollars an acre, the rent of land here. Instead of fencing off pasture they fence what they till, and let cattle, sheep & hogs &c &c go at large to feed on the prairies. This man [*Cheever*] lost his whole crop last year, by cattle breaking in, and so he thought it would be a saving for him to rent it, and as no one here that knew him would take it he just shipped it off upon strangers, positively declaring that he cleared seventy dollars an acre. Three other men took land in the same field, and the result is that the cattle have destroyed nearly the whole crop. There will not be enough left to pay the rent. . . .

It is a hard lesson of experience, but I guess it will do us good! dont you?! One of the other men comes in occasionally completely discouraged, says, "*what shall we do*"?! *Do!!* says I, go to work, as long as the good Lord gives you your health and fingers, use them; never say die, or sit down and cry over spilt milk. Energy and perseverance by the blessing of the Lord *will* insure success. This is just a little of the *spice* that *seasons life*. Henry says that *this* is just a fortaste of what his success would be if he took up land and went to farming(?)

We shall not probably remain here through the winter. Where we shall be we cannot as yet tell. We shall probably go to Annoka or Still-Water, Mr N. having "*received a call*"!! from both places to become their Pastor! Well in the first place after we get settled I shall start a *class-meeting*! Oh! Conference meeting, I mean, and if I felt the spirit move me to speak or pray in their prayer meetings I should do so in spite of the good Deacons. . . . Write and cheer our hearts in this far-of[f] land of the Setting Sun.

Nichols went up to Rum River on horseback in August and preached twice in Branch's boardinghouse. "There is a settlement going up at the mouth of Rum River called Anoka," he wrote. "The people there are desirous I should come and reside at that place and form a church and

preach to them. They offer me some land in a favorable position lying on the Mississippi River. It will be a fine point, and one of interest in its future growth." But the call to Stillwater in September was so much more tempting that he was led to believe that the providence of God was directing his course and shaping the affairs of life for him. He spoke on September 14 at a territorial temperance convention in St. Anthony, on "*Resolved*, As the sense of this convention, that the welfare of our Territory, the interest and safety of our citizens . . . demands the enactment and enforcement of a law prohibiting the traffic in intoxicating drinks."¹⁸ William Holcombe of Stillwater, vice-president of the convention, invited Nichols to preach there the following Sunday. And so on the eighteenth he "partook of the hospitality of Capt. Wm. Holcombe, Elder," and preached in the First Presbyterian Church. On the twenty-eighth he received an official invitation, conveyed in a letter from the captain, to come to Stillwater and settle. The feeling of being settled once more was the deciding factor in his acceptance of the invitation. In a letter to Belchertown he said:

Although I find plenty of Missionary work to do, and places enough at which to preach yet it seems as though I was accomplishing but little *permanent* good, by this rambling, desultory work. At Stillwater my labors will be principally confined to one village, and yet I shall find all that one man can well do. . . . The lesson of this year has taught me the futility of attempting to carry on a farming operation, and be a Minister of the Gospel at the same time. My firm belief is that a Minister while in the active discharge of his duties, should have no other business that will draw away his mind from the great work of the Ministry.

In his diary for October 14, 1853, he wrote: "Sold out all my right and title to crops raised by me the past season. Income not sufficient to pay the rent." On the twenty-sixth he sold the oxen, and on the twenty-eighth set up housekeep-

¹⁸ *Express*, September 17, 1853.

ing in Stillwater. Of his going from St. Anthony, the *Express* of October 29 said:

Rev. H. M. Nichols, of this place, has accepted a call from the Presbyterians of Stillwater, and will henceforth have charge of the Presbyterian church at that place. In Mr. Nichols, our Stillwater friends will find a zealous, eloquent and faithful pastor, and one who fully appreciates the condition and necessities of the church in this Territory, and possesses in an eminent degree, the qualifications for a useful pastoral career. He departs from among us with many sincere regrets on the part of the numerous friends whom, during his sojourn among us, he has attached to him.

The following words in my grandfather's diary, written on Sunday, October 30, bring to a close the first chapter of his life in Minnesota: "Addressed my new congregation with much interest on my part and seemingly much on theirs. May God bless the relation."

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