

Minnesota History and the Schools

A MINNESOTA MELTING POT

Philip D. Jordan

THE STUDY of history begins at home. For years, educators interested in the social studies have urged that pupils first be introduced to the living problems of their own community and then, as their comprehension grows, extend their interests to embrace the state, the region, and finally the world.

All this is good and has worked admirably. Yet, as all historians know, there are many paths — some devious, some straight — leading to an appreciation of the treasures of the past. Each way has its own peculiar merits; and no one approach can honestly be called the best. The developing mind, whether of the child who is thrilled by Paul Revere's ride or of the university student who is just emerging into a larger frame of historical reference, must be given a variety of experiences. The biographical approach most certainly furnishes a personalized zest; the historical novel may sometimes create an atmosphere lacking in uninspired, poorly written texts; and the economic, social, and political interpretations give sane balance to a carefully planned course. Each has its gift to make the student.

A more personalized way to engender the student's interest and to lead him to a realization that he is a part of a living, consistent process is the use of family heritage and background. So many contemporary students feel a sense of isolation — they belong to no one but themselves. They have failed to strike their roots into the way of life of their ancestors and, what is worse, have been unable to grasp that they are temporarily the end result of countless generations of pioneers, fishermen, carpenters, merchants, preachers, lawyers, or just plain dirt farmers.

For more than a decade, I have carried on an experiment in family history in two universities, first in Ohio and then in Min-

nesota.¹ I have used a simple process, but, simple as it is, it leads to unbelievably gratifying results. When students enroll in my course in the history of Minnesota and the Northwest in the University of Minnesota, I ask them to write the story of themselves. Usually they are perfectly appalled. They never really thought of themselves as having a story, any more than most pioneers believed they would be subjects for the historian. Perhaps they fret a bit, complaining that they really have nothing to tell. I know they have a great deal to say. Years of teaching local and regional history have made me realize how much information a student can gather.

Gradually, the students inquire at home, putting naive questions to their parents. "Was I born in a hospital or at home?" It sounds silly to them, but soon they are discovering where their parents were born. Before long, they are haunting libraries—because they themselves are interested in their own past, and are eager to report a new find in class. They search for old letters, diaries, and records; they bring in account books; and proudly they exhibit faded deeds. Sometimes they append photostatic copies of priceless family documents to their reports. They have been known to attach bags of cookies as evidence of the type of cookery "my Norwegian grandmother on my father's side did."

When their work is completed, they have touched the romantic past from many angles and at countless points. They know something of racial tensions, of the tribulations of immigrants, of the arduous work of husbandmen on wind-swept prairies, and of the reasons why their own forebears emigrated to Minnesota. They have personalized history—made it an integral part of themselves. Their assignment has developed into a labor of love; and their reports—which they almost always ask to have returned—reflect their cultural patterns and varied backgrounds. They reveal the

¹ A similar "experiment in family history," conducted in the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, is described by Sister Mary Virginia in the issue of this magazine for December, 1946 (*ante*, 27:319-326). Only after the publication of her article was it learned that Dr. Jordan had been conducting a similar experiment. The essays produced by his students in the spring of 1947, some of which are printed herewith, proved to be of unusual interest and significance both for their records of student backgrounds and for their authentic pictures of Minnesota's varied racial groups and their pattern of life and settlement. *Ed.*

Scandinavian influence, French thought, Swiss and German characteristics, and English traits. Taken as a whole, my students' reports picture the North Star State as a veritable melting pot. The four papers here printed illustrate the satisfying results obtained by using family history to supplement the other, standard approaches.

MY SCANDINAVIAN-GERMAN HERITAGE

Avis Anderson

THIS is the story of my background—as much as I was able to secure and organize in the designated period of time. Many parts are sketchy because of lack of material.

I am one of five children born of Agnes Hoffman and Veggo Anderson. I was born in the town of Albert Lea, Minnesota, in the southern part of the state, and lived there until I was twelve years old. Then my parents purchased an eighty-acre farm near Blooming Prairie and went to farming. I must confess that at the time I thought it was a terrible disgrace to have to move to the country—to live on a farm! Now, when my sense of values has changed and matured, I realize that I had something extra added to my life—something that so many people never know or appreciate.

My father was born in Tylstrup, Denmark, in 1894. His father was a Dane, and his mother was of Danish and Swedish descent. They lived on Heden Farm, which my grandfather owned, near Tylstrup. Grandfather was a farmer.

There were thirteen children in the family, and my father was one of the youngest. When he was eighteen he decided to go to America, and to Minnesota because some neighbor boys had gone there. One day he just packed a few clothes together and left for America. When he arrived, he couldn't speak a word of English. He headed for Minnesota immediately, where he hoped to find someone he knew. He went first to Albert Lea, and secured work as a tiler. The community was predominantly Scandinavian, especially Norwegian, and he could understand the language, so he stayed there and worked while learning the English language and the many new customs in America.

Then Dad went to North Dakota, where he had an uncle who had come over from Denmark. He located the uncle, who had a large farm there. He also had a mean disposition, and my father found it impossible to work for him. So he returned to Minnesota and worked as a hired hand on a farm near Hayward. It was there he met my mother, and they were married before he went into the army in World War I.

Dad has never been back to Denmark. He intends to go someday to see his mother and brothers and sisters. But when you are young and just starting out, there are so many things that keep coming up—unforeseen bills, another baby, etc. Perhaps it won't be too long now before he will be able to return. He used to tell us stories of the things he and his brothers did when they were little. Often when they herded the cows in the meadow (there were few fences), one boy would watch the cattle, the second would steal blackberries from the neighbor's patch, and the third would sneak back home and "borrow" cream from the dairy. Then they would sit out in the meadow and enjoy a delightful feast.

Dad's father, Jens Julius Andersen, died when Dad was very young. He was still a young man, and he might be alive today if he had been given modern medical care. He died from a ruptured appendix, which his doctor did not recognize, and by the time another doctor had been called in, it was too late. Dad doesn't remember much about his father, except that he was very tall and quite stern. When he told one of the children to do something, it was done immediately, and no questions were asked. When Jens was young, he was one of six men who constantly guarded the king of Denmark.

Dad's mother, Petrine Jensine Jensen, is still living, though she is very old. During the war we had no word at all from Denmark, and we feared that she might not survive. Members of the family over there write regularly now and keep us informed about Gram, Dad's brothers and sisters, and their families. They had a pretty rough time during the war, but they say very little about it. The first word we had was about a month after the war in Europe ended. One of the granddaughters wrote and told us that Gram was alive

and well, and wanted to know if we could send her a dress because she didn't have one. Mom didn't know what size to buy, so instead she bought quite a bit of wool and cotton material, thread, and other articles that she thought the people in Denmark would need, and sent them over to Denmark. This was such a little thing, and yet they were so grateful, because they had money, but there was nothing they could buy, with no merchandise of any kind available. Incidents like this make me realize how very fortunate we are in this country. None of Dad's family has ever come over to the states, but perhaps some of the younger ones will come one day.

Because Grandpa Jens died when his children were small, they all had to help with the farm work as soon as they were able. There was very little entertainment in their young lives—they got to the fair once every summer, when each had twenty-five cents to spend. They were brought up to be serious and hard-working. Dad went to a country school, and the children all went barefoot from early spring till the snows came in the fall. Leather shoes were very expensive; the children all wore wooden shoes, and Dad says they were very cold and uncomfortable, and that they hardly ever fit.

Candy was rarely seen in the house, but Grandmother used to make a little confection called peppernuts (I don't know how to spell the Danish name). She would spend hours baking these sweets for the family, and the boys would help her roll out the dough and cut the little candies. This is the recipe:

1 cup butter	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cream	1 teaspoon cream of tartar
1 cup sugar	1 teaspoon nutmeg	1 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup syrup	1 teaspoon pepper	

Mix ingredients and add enough flour to make a dough that can be rolled. Roll in strips about the thickness of a finger, cut in pieces about an inch long, place on cookie sheets, and bake in a moderate oven. It just doesn't seem like Christmas if there isn't a big bowl of peppernuts in the house.

My mother, Agnes Theodora Hoffman, was born on a farm a mile south of what was then Rice Lake, but is now the fertile truck garden area of Hollandale in Riceland Township, Freeborn County,

Minnesota. She lived there with her parents until she met and married my father. Mom had only eight grades of schooling. When she completed the eighth grade she stayed home and worked. There were few high schools in her neighborhood, and it was much more fitting that a country girl stay at home and help her mother.

When Dad was overseas during the last war, Mom worked out. Having no other training, she did housework for some neighbors. The family was large—five children, two hired men, and the grandparents, all living in a huge house. She did the cooking, washing, ironing, baking, etc., for six dollars a week, and during the harvest season she worked in the fields too, driving horses on the binder and mowing hay. When she worked outdoors she received seven dollars a week, and that was considered a very good wage for a woman at that time. Before Mom met Dad, she had taken up dressmaking, but she didn't get a chance to finish her course.

Mom had three brothers, and all four children were born in a log house. When Mom was a year old, Grandpa George Hoffman had a new frame house built, and the log house was used as a summer kitchen for a few years, and then taken down and destroyed.

Mother's father, Grandpa George, who has been dead for thirty-six years, was born on a farm near Dubois, Indiana. I was unable to find out anything about Grandpa George's early life or the lives of his parents, except that they were German farmers who came to this country when they were young. Grandpa George left home when he was young, and joined the Cooper and Bailey (later Bar-num and Bailey) circus as a teamster. He traveled all over the country as the teamster for the cage that held the biggest captive lion of the time. When the circus would go through a town or city, the tamer would chain the lion on top of the cage by one foot. One day the lion put her big paw on Grandpa's shoulder, and he said his hair stood straight up. The lion's disposition wasn't too good, so after this little incident they didn't chain her on top of the cage again. The trainer went through a series of tricks in the lion's cage. The most daring trick consisted of putting his head in the lion's mouth. He always warned the attendants that if they saw

the lion's tail curl, they should shoot her immediately. One day he did this trick, and when the trainer put his head in the lion's mouth, the lion pulled his head right off his shoulders. She had given no warning by curling her tail either. That was enough for Grandpa—he left the circus. We don't know how many years he was with the circus, or what he did when he left it.

Later Grandpa George went to Laramie, Wyoming, where he became foreman on a large horse ranch. Grandpa loved horses and he was an excellent horseman. He always had the best in riding equipment. Even when he came to Minnesota and settled down to be a farmer, he had the best trained and groomed horses in the countryside. I can remember that when I was small and we went out to the farm to visit, we kids would go up to the huge attic and look at all the things there. I remember Grandpa's saddle, and his leather chaps, and his big ten-gallon hat hanging on pegs. I wonder what became of them when the farm was sold three years ago.

While Grandpa was out in Wyoming, he met and married Rosie Fjelbrotten, who was visiting there at the time. They came to Minnesota and bought a two-hundred-acre farm just south of Hollandale in Riceland Township, near where Rosa had lived earlier. There they settled, to raise a family and till the soil.

Grandpa George was a very stern man, and his discipline, I am inclined to think from what I've heard, was pretty stiff at times. But he was an honest, straight-forward, God-fearing, hard-working man. He was a good citizen, and active in affairs that promoted the welfare of the community and the county, as is evidenced by an account of his life in a *History of Freeborn County* published in 1911. He was well known and respected around Hayward and Albert Lea. He was a good farmer—that is, he knew *how* to farm, and he was a farmer because he wanted to be one, and not because he knew no other way to earn a living. I think that is an important qualification for being a good farmer.

When Mom was fourteen, grandpa took the team and drove to Hayward to get a load of coal one day, and en route he suffered a sunstroke and died. Grandma and the children carried on the farm work.

Grandma — Rosie Fjelbrotten, my mother's mother — was born in Aadalen, Norway. Her father was what was called a timber chopper, and there were ten children in the family. When Gram was seven years old, her parents decided to go to America; they had heard of the wonderful opportunities in this country, and it was hard to earn a meager living for such a large family in Norway.

The ocean voyage was long and uncomfortable. The family came to Minnesota because one of the relatives had come here earlier. They arrived late in the fall, and Ole Fjelbrotten took up a homestead near Lerdahl in Freeborn County. It was so late in the fall, that he had time to build only a one-room sod hut on the side of a hill and a sod shed for the cow. Gram says that all twelve of them lived all winter in this sod house, which had a dirt floor and very crude furniture. That first winter was one of the worst Minnesota has ever had. All the Fjelbrotens had to eat was potatoes, salt pork, and milk from the cow. As the winter wore on, the cow went dry, and by spring all they had was potatoes and salt.

There was a terrible blizzard that year, and the family couldn't get out of the house for days. Grandma's father had managed to get to the shed at the beginning of the storm, and had run a rope from the shed to the house. This was his only guide, and without it he would have been unable to reach the shed to feed and water his precious little stock. They melted snow for water all winter. When the storm was over and they could dig their way out, the house was completely buried in a snow drift. That winter was extremely cold, and they had to wear practically all the clothes they owned (which wasn't much) to keep warm.

The family was poor, and everyone had to work hard. As soon as the children were old enough, they went out to work for other people for their keep. When Grandma was working for some neighbors, she got an infection in her leg. As doctors were scarce and hard to reach, she didn't receive medical care. Her leg got worse, and finally became so bad she couldn't walk, and the pain was very severe. It finally became apparent that she needed a doctor, so they hitched up the horses and drove to Albert Lea to get

one. He lanced the leg and gave instructions for its care, and told Grandma's parents that they were lucky to still have Rosa. She was unable to walk for almost a year, and she still carries three very deep scars on her leg.

After Grandma recovered, she went out to work for some neighbors. She used to help work in the fields as well as in the house. She loved working outdoors. Love for the country and for being outdoors seems to run very strongly on both sides of our family. One day when Gram was in Albert Lea she saw a horse that was all twisted up in its lines at a hitching post. She stopped and untangled the lines and then got some oats and fed the horse. A man came out of a store just then, and came up to her. He said he had seen what she had done, and thought she was very kind. He thanked her for helping his horse and then on impulse asked her if she would like to work for him. He was a doctor, and he and his wife had no children. They were very good to Gram, and kind. She didn't have to work hard, and she always took care of the doctor's horse for him. She too loved horses. The doctor and his wife decided to take a long vacation in Wyoming, and they insisted that Gram go with them. It was on this trip that she met my grandfather and married him.

Gram was a wonderful pioneer woman. She worked hard all her life, and as long as I have known her I have never heard her complain. The younger generations could take a few pointers from these early pioneers. Gram had very little formal education, yet she is today more broad-minded, liberal, and understanding than many younger people I know. Her set of values on the things that count in life are wonderful. She is young in spirit, in spite of her age. I can sit down and talk with her just as I do with my friends at school, and somehow she sees things in the same light as I do. I think I have a wonderful grandmother, and the only thing that troubles me is the fact that she might not be here too much longer.

A number of years ago Gram went to Norway to visit her old home and her relatives. She also went to Denmark and visited Dad's mother, became acquainted with her, and gave her news of the family. Grandmother Petrine appreciated the visit so much—

it brought us here in America so much closer to all of them in Denmark.

This is my heritage—hard-working, pioneer people, with endless perseverance and courage, and with faith in the future.

MY YUGOSLAV BACKGROUND

Thomas A. Dasovich

FATHER WAS BORN in 1879 in Gospic, Lika, province of Croatia, which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He grew up on a farm and often went to visit and watch the men working in the iron mines north of the farm.

It was required by law that each able-bodied man must serve two years in the army. Many of the men who did not like the idea of being in the army left for the United States, but Father spent two years in the army of Emperor Francis Joseph. He likes to tell of the time when he and some companions were on guard duty at a bridge and Francis Joseph went by and stopped to return the salute of his soldiers.

After his service in the army, Father returned to Gospic and married my mother, Helen Allar. Letters from the United States told of jobs for the asking and of the money which one could make there. These letters came from a cousin, Luka Dasovich, who was working in a rolling mill in Chicago. He told my father to come and stay with him, then later send for my mother.

In 1901 Father started out for the United States. As he didn't have much money, he worked his way through Germany until he reached Hamburg. He sailed from there on the ship "Bremen." After reaching New York he went by boat to San Francisco, as his money had given out and he paid for his passage by working on board ship. In California he began to work on the railroads, on which he traveled to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado. In Colorado he worked on the railroad until he had enough money to go to Chicago, where there were friends and relatives.

There members of each nationality formed into groups, and

when they heard of new jobs they migrated to them. The Croatians in Chicago were told of work in the iron and copper mines of Michigan. Father went there and worked in the mines. He liked the work, as it reminded him of the mines at home. After the ore season was over in Michigan he returned to Chicago to wait for spring and the beginning of a new ore season. While sitting around talking to others who worked as miners in different parts of the country, he decided to go to Minnesota, where he was told that new mines were opening up faster than the owners could get workers.

On the Mesabi Range he worked in such towns as Hibbing, where the largest open-pit iron mine in the world is located today, Keewatin, Eveleth, Ely, Aurora, Stevenson — almost any place where there was a mine and where track had to be laid. Some of the towns later were to become practically ghost towns until the outbreak of the Second World War.

About twenty-two miles from Hibbing the International Harvester Company started the Hawkins mine just on the outskirts of the town of Nashwauk, or rather the town just extended itself from the edge of the pit. There my father decided to settle down so that he could in time send for my mother. Nashwauk is an Indian word meaning mud hole, and in 1906 that name really fitted. Life in a mining town was rough. There wasn't much in Nashwauk except twenty-four saloons, company stores, and boarding-houses.

As the work at the mine grew, so did the town. Men brought in their families, and a church and a school were built. Then Father decided it was time to send for Mother. In 1910 she left her native Croatia for the United States. My father had paid for her ticket and arranged to have her met in New York before she journeyed on to Minnesota. Her boat sailed from Havre, France. She traveled alone and like a child she wore a tag pinned on her coat giving her name and her destination.

For the shipping of ore, the Duluth, Missabe and Iron Range Railroad had come into being. Mother got her first glimpse of the red ore she was to get tired of washing off dinner pails at Duluth as she boarded the train for Hibbing. Along the way she saw the

ore waiting to be loaded on cars and taken to Duluth for shipment by boat over the Great Lakes and to the industrial East. Safe with father in a large house, she soon adapted herself to the new country. She put the big frame house to good use by taking in boarders.

Both she and Father worked long, hard hours. Mother cooked for the men, some of whom worked underground on different shifts, so she worked practically night and day. There were twenty-two boarders to care for. When the table was set, there was man-sized food on it, as the men did hard physical work. To cook twenty to thirty pounds of meat was an everyday task for Mother, who also had five boys in these years. She often tells us how the boarders would watch us while she did her work.

About 1928 the underground work for miners was dying out at Nashwauk, and the men left for other towns or returned to the Old Country. Father had become a track foreman and Mother turned to fixing a new and smaller house and to caring for her family. Mother brought with her many customs from her homeland. She bakes *pavatesa*, a kind of coffee bread, and she uses beautiful hand-woven coverlets, full of color, that her family sent her. One of these coverlets she has given to my wife, who prizes it as a work of art of a kind not found here in America. My family is deeply religious. When we were children we thought the custom of treating certain saints' days as holidays was fun, as we did no work on such days that could not be done on other days, and we were sure to have some special food to honor the saint.

My mother and father both got their American citizenship after attending night-school classes. Through their interest in our schooling and the activities in which we took part, Mother and Father soon were following football and basketball games. Living in a mining town had its advantages, as taxes on ore gave the schools a chance to secure the best buildings and equipment, as well as money to grow on. As we grew up and reached high-school age, each one of us worked in the mines to earn money during vacation time.

Of the five sons in our family, Nicky, who is a lineman, has one child—a girl, Mary Margaret. After having so many boys in the

family, it is nice to have a girl. Stephen, who is unmarried, is home after serving five years in the army — two of them overseas. He is still undecided whether to go on to college or to take a job in Alaska. He spent two years at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, but as he is now much older than the average student, he finds it hard to think of going back to school. George is a blacksmith; he is the only one of my brothers to be employed by the same mine that my father worked for. Joe is studying to be an automobile mechanic at Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis. That leaves me, Thomas, the youngest. I am married and have a boy named Andrew who was born February 2, 1945. His saint's day is the fourth of February. Following an old custom my mother brought with her from Europe, my wife and I and Andy will set aside that day as a holiday, just as my mother does.

My brother Joe served in both theaters of war, while I spent my time in the Pacific. My mother and father are in their late sixties, and it is easier for Mother now that we are all home. Father worked for the same company for forty years and he is now living on a pension. This covers the Dasovich family up to the present time. I must add that the war has left only one niece on my mother's side of the family back in Gospic, Yugoslavia. As soon as she is able, she will come to the United States and our ties with the Old World will be over.

MY FRENCH AND SCOTCH ANCESTORS

George A. Mills

MY MATERNAL GREAT-GRANDFATHER, Paul Thiers, was born in France in 1835. He was of the same family as President Louis Adolphe Thiers of the Third French Republic, who was my great-great-uncle. At the age of fourteen, Great-grandfather began serving in the French military forces, and he stayed there for fourteen years. For reasons unknown to me, he left the military service and turned to farming in northern France when he was twenty-eight years old.

My maternal great-grandmother, Therese LaBlanc, was born in

1838 in Alsace-Lorraine, but while she was still in school her family moved to northern France. There she met my great-grandfather and became Mrs. Paul Thiers in 1857. They had three children before they left France in 1862, when, sick of the life of the proletarian class, they sailed for America and settled in Evansville, Indiana. It was there that my grandmother, Martha Thiers, was born in 1864. She was a frail child as a result of repeated attacks of fever and ague, and it was for her sake that in 1868 the Thiers family moved to the state of good health—Minnesota. In a thickly wooded area just twenty miles west of St. Cloud, the Thiers settled. There were other families in the settlement, and they helped each other clear the land for farming. For the common interest of their children, the settlers erected a country school, which my maternal grandmother attended.

In 1881 Martha met and married Louis Rabishung (pronounced Răb-i-shaw), my maternal grandfather. He was a hired man on a neighboring farm, and during a young people's gathering at the school, where an organ furnished a lively background for gala evenings of games and dancing, the couple met. They were married in Martha's home just four months later. Louis tried his hand at farming for a short time. The Rabishungs lived in a log cabin near St. Cloud, where their first child was born. Martha, being a delicate woman, nearly succumbed in childbirth under such primitive conditions. After two years of hard winters out in the woods, Louis decided to give up wheat raising, even though it had proved lucrative, and moved his family to St. Cloud proper.

In St. Cloud, Louis learned to be a master carpenter. Years later he found it profitable to spend time as guard at the state penitentiary. The Rabishung family increased as one boy and two daughters were born in a span of five years, and my mother, Alma, came as the youngest child in 1889. The Catholic church was rapidly gaining members in the Rabishung's neighborhood, thanks to Louis and Martha.

"In 1898," Mother writes, the family moved to St. Paul, which was a big step in our lives." There Louis became a successful carpenter and his children enjoyed good educations and made many

friends. Mother writes the following in an effort to describe the weather and general recreation of her days: "The winters were severe, with temperatures many times holding at -20° and -30° for weeks at a time, and blizzards and heavy snows were a common occurrence. The young folks had great fun skating on ponds and on the Mississippi River, and sleigh ride parties were frequent; after which everyone would gather at someone's house for some oyster stew and a song-fest accompanied by an organ."

Grandfather bought Mother a square piano while she was in high school. Later he bought an upright so she could practice on the newest type of instrument. These attempts to uncover or promote genius along musical lines proved fruitless. Mother did, however, learn enough music to be a boon at any social gathering.

Mother was one of the children in the early 1900's who was lucky enough to complete a college course. While she was in school, her brother George (after whom I am named), was killed while repairing a faulty telephone line. Improper insulation and ignorance about the danger of electricity caused the accident. Mother taught school for two years after graduating from college in 1910. A more attractive job as stenographer came up in 1912, so she gave up teaching. One office party she attended was held on a houseboat on the St. Croix River, and this furnished the opportunity for her to meet her future husband.

I will say more of my parents later, but now I would like to trace my maternal grandfather's history up to the time when he married Martha. Great-grandfather Rabishung was born in 1818 in France. We know little of his family life except that he was the only one of five sons to marry. The whole family moved to America when he was quite young. Each son took a separate path and my great-grandfather married and settled in Syracuse, New York. His son Louis was born there about 1856. In 1870, Louis, with his father, mother, and sister, moved to Minnesota, settling west of St. Cloud. The great wheat crops were the attraction. Great-grandfather Rabishung "lost his shirt" when the locusts came in 1873-77. When he married Martha Thiers, Louis, who was an only son and the eldest in the family, received a tract of land and a team of oxen as a

wedding present from his parents. When he gave up farming and moved to St. Cloud, he return his parents' present to them.

I do not want to make light of the settlers' work in clearing the land for farming. To make a clearing meant arduous toil in cutting the trees and grubbing out the stumps. My ancestors were real pioneers and they not only had to fight the elements and grub for each foot of clear land, but they were in constant danger of being attacked by wolf packs. In spite of their rugged existence among the hazards of the Northwest, my great-grandparents lived to be very old. The Thiers were in their nineties when they died and the Rabishungs lived to see their eighties. My maternal grandparents proved to be not quite so hardy as their parents. Martha really worked herself to death. The constant baking, scrubbing, and cleaning wore her out completely at the age of fifty-eight. Louis lived a good number of years after his wife's death. As a widower, he lived with his married children. He seemed to spend a few months at the home of each of his daughters, and he enjoyed himself immensely. He dressed like a banker fresh off Wall Street, with cravat, gray spats, mirror shoes, diamond stick pin, gold watch chain, and a beautiful derby; the neatly pressed suit we may take for granted. At the age of eighty-three, Grandfather Rabishung fell on the ice at his daughter Laura's house in Bismarck, North Dakota. He was knocked out at the time, and he never regained consciousness.

The paternal side of my family tree is quite bare of information. My paternal grandmother, Peggy McLeod, was a Scotch Highlander. She came to America with her family when a very young child. Her people settled in Nova Scotia and lived in Canada for many years. The severe winters and crude living conditions in Nova Scotia proved too much for Peggy's parents, and they both died while their three children were very young. Peggy and the other two children were raised by relatives in the traditional Scotch Presbyterian manner, for they were very religious and very stern. She remained in Nova Scotia until she and Grandfather Mills were married about 1850.

My paternal grandfather Mills was born in Canada of English and Scotch parents. They originally settled in the United States,

but since they were confirmed Loyalists, they went to Canada to be under the protection of the king of England. They remained in Canada for the rest of their lives. (I am sorry I cannot relate just where they settled or how my paternal grandfather and grandmother met, but the information is not known to me.)

About fifteen years after Grandfather Mills married, he moved to the United States and settled in Detroit, Michigan, with his wife and son, Wilbert Robert Mills, my father. Wilbert was born in Sarnia, Ontario, in 1880. He spent most of his early days in that city, but he spent his summers on an uncle's farm. Mother claims that Father's accounts of life and entertainment on the farm sounded exactly like a Ralph Connor story of barn raisings, quilting parties, box socials, and church gatherings.

Father attended high school and business college in Detroit. After he completed his schooling, he went to San Francisco to work in the ticket office of the Great Northern Railroad. Later a position as stenographer was offered him in the advertising department of the railroad in St. Paul. He accepted the offer, and went on up the ladder to become assistant advertising agent of the railroad. It was at this point in his career that he met Alma Rabishung. Three years later, Wilbert and Alma were married—but only after an incident which reflected the prevailing attitude toward marriages between people of different religions, and also the fine spirit of Grandfather Rabishung. Since Alma was Catholic and Wilbert was not, special dispensation was needed to permit them to marry in a Protestant church. The priest refused to permit or recognize such an arrangement, and he assured Alma that her father would be of the same mind. But Grandpa Rabishung asserted that he would recognize her marriage, no matter where it took place. Needless to say my mother was married in the manner she desired, at the place she desired, and she left the Catholic church. This marked a turning point in the life of Alma.

Shortly after my parents' marriage, Wilbert was again promoted, and he became advertising manager of the Great Northern Railroad. In this position he was instrumental in developing the historical points of interest along the route of the Great Northern.

In recognition of his work, he was presented with the first three volumes of Dr. Folwell's *History of Minnesota*.

From the time my parents were married in 1915 to 1924 they had six children, of whom I am the youngest. The growing family was not too much disturbed during the First World War. Father was active in the Red Cross supply division in the Twin Cities, and he received citations for his fine work in administering such a complete task. Medical science was not advanced quite far enough in 1929 to prevent my father from succumbing to complications which followed an appendicitis operation. I was but four years old at the time, so I remember very little of his personality and ways. From his friends and my mother, I have learned to think of him as a man one attempts to be like.

Years of struggle followed 1929. My mother was obliged to work and run the household at the same time. As the children grew older, Mother's work lessened, and by 1941 three of her children had married. Today Mother can look back to Minnesota and sigh with relief. Her working days over, she has joined four of her children in California. The oldest child, Peggy, has moved with her family to Neenah, Wisconsin, and I, George, receive frequent letters in which my mother describes the new and old scenes in this, her native land, Minnesota and the Northwest.

MY BRITISH BACKGROUND—WITH VARIATIONS

Dorothy Townsend

THE TOWNSEND or Townshend family is of mixed Saxon and Norman origin and is of great antiquity in the country of Norfolk, England. The first Townsend in my family about whom we have any information is my great-grandfather, Edward Cutts Townsend, who was born in Warwickshire, England, about 1810. We do not know when he came to America, but he was a widower at the time and left two sons in England. The only members of his family to

join him here were two nephews whom he ultimately sent back because they were too wild.

His wife, Josephine Koeplar, was born in Lucerne, Switzerland. Her family was originally from Bavaria, but her mother married in Switzerland. Her husband's father had received a large castle and estate in the Alps in return for services to the government, but the younger Koeplar dissipated the entire family wealth. At the time of the birth of my great-grandmother, the seventeenth of eighteen children, her parents were living in one wing of the crumbling castle. They were very superstitious, and one day when her father's face swelled abnormally, they concluded that the trouble was caused by ghosts in the old chapel of the castle, which they used as a potato cellar. A moat surrounded the old building, and it was necessary to cross it on a drawbridge whenever the Koeplars went down the mountain.

At the age of seventeen my great-grandmother married a widower named Busch, but soon afterward he helped a Jesuit priest escape and then was forced to leave the country himself. Her family had disapproved of the marriage in the first place and kept all his correspondence from her, but when it became obvious that she was going to follow him to America, they produced a few of the letters. She made the trip alone sometime in the 1840's on a sailing vessel. It took six weeks, and many of her fellow passengers died before the voyage was completed.

Upon reaching New York she could speak only German, and she had no idea where to look for her husband. It was a year before she found him, and during the interval she worked in the home of a wealthy family. Just a few months after she did locate Busch (we do not know his first name), he was killed in an accident. Not long after that she married Edward Townsend, an expressman and hotelkeeper.

Joseph Edward Townsend, their only child, was born on November 20, 1853, on Canal Street in Albany, New York, near the steamboat landing on the Hudson River. Young Edward was three years old when, in 1857, his parents disposed of their hotel in Albany and

set out to search for gold in California. They traveled by rail to the end of the line at Galena, Illinois, and there joined a covered-wagon train to cross the plains. At Independence, Iowa, they were stopped by members of the United States cavalry, who persuaded them not to go on to California because of the danger of Indian raids and massacres on the western trail.

They therefore decided to take a steamboat up the Mississippi to St. Paul. There they looked over some lots, but were not very well satisfied with them. When acquaintances told them of a town called Belle Plaine City, about forty miles up the Minnesota River, they debated whether or not to abandon St. Paul for an unknown place, but they were persuaded to try Belle Plaine City. On the way up the river the captain told Edward, Sr., that he did not believe Belle Plaine City would ever amount to much, but if the Townsends would remain on the boat and go a mile farther upstream, he would let them off at a new town that was just being laid out, Belle Plaine. The captain's advice was followed, and Belle Plaine City, which a few years later reverted to pasture land, was passed by. In his recollections, my grandfather tells about the ghost town of Belle Plaine City and the planning of Belle Plaine by Judge A. G. Chatfield.

In Belle Plaine the Townsends established a hotel half way down the hill on the way to the river landing. In paging through some old copies of the *Belle Plaine Inquirer*, a newspaper which expired during the Civil War, I came across the following advertisement:

"TOWNSEND HOUSE ON THE BLUFF

"This new house is nearly completed and will be open for the reception of guests in a few days.

"The proprietor will endeavor to make all those that call on him comfortable at reasonable rates.

"E. C. TOWNSEND

December 1, 1857"

A curious thing about this advertisement is that it ran with exactly the same wording all through 1858 and 1859. Even if it was a lot of work to change type in those days, they might at least have said the place was open. It was also known as the Mechanics Hotel

because so many people who worked in the local foundry stayed there.

Young Edward's school days were spent much like those of other children of his time. The schools were mostly short-lived private ones, and his formal education carried him through about the present sixth grade. Books were few, and the teachers were strict believers in the proverb "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

The following is taken from my grandfather's recollections of the Sioux Indian uprising of 1862: "When news of the Indian outbreak reached Belle Plaine it was probably on August 19, for I know that on the same evening a volunteer company of about twenty men was organized at once. They selected John O'Neill, one of our merchants, whom it was said had some military training, for their captain, and were put through a hurry-up training on Main Street, marching back and forth between the O'Neill store, where the Weibeler corner is now, and about where the Presbyterian church now stands. [*This now is a distance of two blocks.*] Teams were very scarce in those days and my father had a good span of horses and a wagon, so he joined the company, being so well provided to haul provisions and ammunition.

"The whole outfit left for St. Peter early next morning, where they were met by recruiting officers from Fort Snelling and were all drafted to serve, except my father, E. C. Townsend, who was beyond the age, being fifty-two at the time. However, when his horses, which he thought so much of, were drafted, he informed the officers that wherever they went he was going with them. On account of his team, which was needed so badly, he was among the last to get home that fall after the Indians were driven into Dakota.

"Shortly after his arrival home one of his horses died and the government paid for it. My father, however, broken in health after his experience, had to take to his bed and died the following April. But there was no pay for him or pension for my mother because he could not be drafted and went of his own free will to look after his horses."

Edward Townsend wrote the following letter when he was haul-

ing provisions between St. Peter and Fort Ridgely. It was found in 1913 among some old documents and is still in a good state of preservation, although my great-grandfather's old-fashioned handwriting is not easy to read. He dated the letter at St. Peter on September 7, 1862, and addressed it to "Dear Wife." It reads:

"I now write to you, hoping this will find you in good health and the dear boy which I left behind. We are in great trouble in this part of the state, having many difficulties to contend with. I am happy to say that I have been well in health since I left home but have seen hard times. I have not slept on a bed but once since I left and that was at Keyser's, St. Peter. Henry Crossen is boarding with him and they all send their respects to you. I am writing this in his house.

"We have fifty-five teams here today for Fort Ridgely. We left the fort yesterday at ten o'clock and got to St. Peter at eleven o'clock last night. We loaded up store goods from the warehouse and steamboat for the fort and start back tomorrow, Monday. I have tried every way to get back but cannot at present. Expect the horses will not stand the work much longer. The Covington horse I had given up once but is now at work again. I have him here with Charley. My horses are getting very poor, you can see their ribs at a distance. They find the difference in being tied to the wheel of the wagon and eating oats in the straw as we have no hay or oats nearer than Le Sueur to haul from.

"If we stay here or leave for Redwood we must have oats or corn, or the horses will all die soon, as the flies are so bad and the grass so short that they cannot live long. I drove forty-five miles yesterday, and all the teams but mine got here today, Sunday, and this is the first day's rest since I left home.

"I have seen quite a change in life since I parted with you and the dear boy. Give my love to him and yourself receive the same. hoping to see you again but cannot say when, unless my horses fail in their work. I have the prairie for my bed and the buffalo robes for my pillow and quilt. I expect my pants at St. Peter on Sunday week and got a pair of overalls on board the new Graham Bell. They reached a little below the knees and were covered with grease

but had to wear them all week. I got an old pair from Crossen today so I can get along. I bought two pairs of socks so I can have changes. Having shoes on so many hours my feet sweat. I sent by Mr. Guion for a clean shirt but he has not returned yet. I will get away the first opportunity I can. If I would leave my wagon and horses for someone to drive I could get a furlough for a short time, but they would cry shame on the Belle Plaine company for anyone leaving their place in the company after making such a determination to fight the Indians and be so frightened by the smell of a few dead bodies.

"I wish to send you a little account of my travels. I left here on Saturday and travelled through the Swede settlement which is fifteen miles from Henderson. There we found houses, and stacks of hay and grain in flames, houses deserted, murders committed and no inhabitants left in that part of the country. I have not time to give you the particulars now, but will do so if I live to see you once more. It is the flower of this part of the country. There is at present thousands of acres of wheat and barley not stacked and all the people left the country, many leaving everything they had. We went from there to St. Peter, having traveled about fifty miles. The next day we left for the fort [*Ridgely*] which took us three days. There the buildings were, many of them burned to ashes, others robbed, and desolation was seen for forty-five miles through as fine a country as anyone would wish to travel, but now left with all its grain of the best quality, potatoes in abundance, turnips and all vegetables. We got to the fort and the smell at the foot of the hill was very bad from dead bodies. Some were Indians and others white inhabitants that were killed at the fight they had there. They burned all the out buildings, store houses, stores, wagons and everything they could outside the main buildings and fired through the windows of the latter.

"I left the fort with forty-four teams Friday for St. Peter, with two hundred and upwards of men, women and children, most of whom had seen hard times and heavy troubles. They went to the fort for safety, having fled from their homes, many with nothing on but their chemises and some with frocks, many nearly naked. The

dead and murdered I shall not give you an account of at present.

"The cavalry left the fort the same day I got back to the fort. Hearing no account from them, the artillery and infantry left the next evening and we got to the field of battle in time to save many of our men who were being surrounded by the Indians, but before we reached them they had shot all the horses and completely riddled them with bullets. Out of one hundred and two horses only two returned to the fort, the one was the horse Smith, the bugler, rode and this one had two flesh wounds. The other, a gray horse belonging to the St. Peter cavalry. Smith received two wounds in the arm and one in the thigh but is out of danger. Hallbrook and Hubert Schmitt were shot dead instantly. There were seventeen died on the battlefield and five since they came to the fort. Sherwin had a fracture of the ribs but is out of danger. There are forty-five wounded in the hospital in the fort, the particulars you will get if I live to see you." The letter is signed, "In haste from your affectionate husband, E. C. Townsend."

My grandfather tells what went on in Belle Plaine while his father was away. "Our most exciting adventure at home was after my father's departure. He left my mother to run the hotel with what assistance she could get from the hired girls and boarders from the mill and foundry," he writes. "Then came the rush of refugees from up the river. Those coming through Henderson and from there down would take the bottom or river road which would land them at our hotel on Grove street, while those fleeing from the Le Sueur direction and southwest would reach the center of town over the Le Sueur road. A great many women and children left Belle Plaine for Shakopee, Fort Snelling and St. Paul, which were the destinations of about all who reached here from up the river."

Edward C. Townsend was buried in the little graveyard of a country Episcopal church. His wife remarried a few months after his death, and she left the community. Her third husband, another widower, was a Swiss named Swingler, but he died almost immediately and the following year she returned to Belle Plaine. In the short interval, my great-grandfather's grave had completely grown over, and it has never been found. The old, abandoned church and

perhaps half a dozen headstones are still there, but there is nothing to indicate the grave of Edward Cutts Townsend. After her third husband's death, my great-grandmother again used the name of Townsend, probably because it was her son's name.

When word reached my great-grandmother's family in Switzerland that Swingler was not a Catholic, they disowned her, and therefore I have no record of my Swiss ancestors. Apparently they never learned that her second husband was a devout member of the Church of England.

The Mechanics Hotel burned to the ground shortly after the death of E. C. Townsend, leaving the mother and son practically penniless. My grandfather started working at the age of fourteen as water carrier for a construction crew engaged in building the railroad between Belle Plaine and Le Sueur. In 1869 he worked for a time in a stove factory, and also in that year and in 1870 he ran a photograph gallery in Belle Plaine. Then for two years he clerked in a general store. In the fall of 1872 he went to Ottawa, where he manufactured hickory hoops for the Chicago market.

Always there had been the thought that he wanted to make printing his life work. That had been his ambition ever since, as a boy, he had watched the typesetters working in the office of the *Belle Plaine Inquirer*. Finally, he arranged to go to St. Peter, where he could pay the weekly paper a small monthly amount for allowing him to learn the art of printing in its shop. In 1874 he started his independent career as a commercial printer. The greatest craze in the country at that time was for calling cards, and he engaged in the business of printing them. By advertising in the big eastern literary papers, he obtained orders from every state in the Union and from Canada, Mexico, and England. The fad was quite the thing until 1878 and 1879, when it began to die out, and then ceased completely.

In November, 1877, J. E. Townsend returned to Belle Plaine, which he had always considered his home, and there he continued his job printing. Friends began to urge him to start a weekly newspaper in his office, and toward the end of 1881 he had all the arrangements made for the first issue of the *Belle Plaine Herald*, which

appeared on the first Thursday of 1882. For fifty-seven years his name was associated with the ownership of that paper.

In 1933 and 1934 J. E. Townsend wrote a series of reminiscences of life in early Belle Plaine. They were printed in the *Herald* and kept in a scrapbook by his daughter. One of his longest articles describes the store business in the 1870's. My grandfather started clerking when he was seventeen, and he was a "counter jumper" for two years. He tells how eggs, butter, and meat were purchased from the farmers, describes the appearance of a general store, and records the current wage scale. He worked about eighty hours a week, and his salary was twenty-five dollars a month. In subsequent articles he describes some of Belle Plaine's other industries—hoop and hoop-pole making, flour milling, lumber sawing, stave manufacturing, brick making, the local breweries, the foundry, the hop yards, and, of course, farming.

He wrote an article on a controversy between the Belle Plaine merchants and the property owners over raising money for a bridge across the river, and he reported the efforts to influence the vote of the nontaxpayers. He devoted one piece to Le Sueur County's war over the location of the county seat and he described the marsh that, as a result of this battle, became the city of Le Center. He tells two rather amusing stories about the early railroad. One concerns a group of Bohemian immigrants on their way to New Prague; the other reveals what the obstinacy of one man could do to a railroad, temporarily, at least. Unusual, to me, is his account of the circuses that came to the little town of Belle Plaine. Among those which were to become known nationally were P. T. Barnum's, Bailey's, and Ringling Brothers. In another article he writes about the nationality groups in the Minnesota Valley. The first to come were the Yankees, who were displaced by the Germans. The series includes some very extensive articles about the Indians and wild life in the Minnesota Valley.

In 1880 J. E. Townsend married Julia Harty, who was born in Freeborn County, Minnesota, of Irish parents. We know nothing further about her family. In 1882 their oldest child, my father, was born. They planned to name him Edward Charles, but when he was

baptized an uncle known as "Lady Dan" Callahan refused to be his godfather unless the name was changed to Daniel Charles. So Daniel it was, although Dad always goes by the name Charles. Just after giving birth to another child—Mary Josephine—Julia died, and the baby soon followed her. A few years later my grandfather married Josephine Mares, who brought up Charles and seven more children.

The family lived in the older section of town at the top of a hill above the river and the railroad tracks. The household of three adults, eight children, and numerous pets was completely dominated by my great-grandmother, and until her death at the age of eighty-eight her influence was felt in every family activity.

After a short illness J. E. Townsend died of pneumonia in Belle Plaine at the age of eighty-five. Age did not impair his mind in any way, and he always loved to tell the family about the things that happened in his youth. He was a staunch Democrat and he served as postmaster during Cleveland's second administration. He was borough clerk for thirty-six years—Belle Plaine is Minnesota's only borough and it does not like to have that little distinction overlooked—and for many years he was a trustee of Sacred Heart parish. His second wife died five years after his death.

Of my grandfather's eight children, only two, Charles and Grace, stayed in Belle Plaine. Of the others Mayme is in Nampa, Idaho, Edward, Jr., Josephine, and Archie are in Minneapolis, while Clara and Ann live in St. Paul. There are eighteen grandchildren.

My father attended the public school in Belle Plaine, completing the eleventh grade. Then the school board decided that there were not enough students in the class to make it worthwhile to continue the more advanced classes, so they simply removed them from the curriculum. A year later father took a combination of high school and college courses at St. Thomas College in St. Paul, but he did not complete his work there because he was needed at home. My grandfather intensely disliked the part of the newspaper business which required him to answer letters, write editorials, and compile local items, so at the age of about eighteen father partially took over these departments. About 1905 the masthead of the paper was

changed, naming D. C. Townsend editor, and J. E. Townsend publisher. It remained that way until the death of my grandfather in 1938 left D. C. Townsend as editor and publisher.

Charles Townsend married Genevieve Gillrup, and in 1914 their daughter Mary was born. About three years later the mother died and the little girl spent most of her childhood in the home of her grandparents. In 1925 he married Pearl Forslof of Crary, North Dakota, and they have three children, Dorothy, Jean, and Edward.

On the Forslof side of my family we do not have much definite information. My maternal grandmother was Elizabeth Soby, who was born near Oslo, Norway, in 1874. Her parents died when she was a baby, and she came to America with an aunt and uncle. They settled in Crary, and there Elizabeth married Andrew Forslof, who had recently come with his parents from Sweden. They had three daughters—Pearl, Ara, and Alice. About 1901 Andrew Forslof bought the first two telephones in his neighborhood and connected them between his home and that of his parents. Soon their neighbors bought telephones and asked to be connected, until there were so many that he found it necessary to buy a switchboard and set up a telephone exchange. He operated it until my grandmother's death in 1942.

I was born on April 7, 1926, and was graduated from the Belle Plaine High School in 1944. I attended the College of St. Catherine for two years, and then transferred to the University of Minnesota. My sister Jean was born in 1928 and my brother Edward in 1930.

This is all I know now of my family history. My grandfather Townsend left more material than can be covered in a paper such as this, but of the rest of the family there are a number of details I would give anything to know.



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