# Forgotten Persephones

# Women Farmers on the Frontier

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OCCUPATION: farmer. This appellation, usually reserved to men, also describes single women—whether unmarried or widowed—who were present on the Midwest frontier since it opened. In Minnesota, women homesteaded in all regions of the state right from the start. In 1863, when the land offices opened for homesteading, a Minnesota sample shows that one unmarried woman homesteaded for every four unmarried men—a ratio of one out of five, or 20 percent. In another sample, homestead records show that about 2,400 women without husbands homesteaded in Minnesota from 1863 to 1889 for at least a year and gained title to their land. Sixty-six percent made the homestead application in their own name, either as widows or single women. These records, which cover a minimum of five years between settlement and proving up, show that women actively sought and farmed the land by themselves. Many more women bought farms either from the state or federal governments, from the railroads, or from other farmers, who may themselves have preempted or homesteaded the land.[1]

These pioneering women in Minnesota were not alone. As early as 1843 women claimed rights to land in Iowa under the 1841 Pre-emption Act. Susan B. Anthony claimed that by the mid-1880s one-third of the land in Dakota Territory was owned by women. And contemporary historian Sheryll Patterson-Black found that in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century 11.9 percent of a sample of homestead applicants in Colorado and Wyoming were women. Of them, 42 percent proved up on their claim, more than the 37 percent of the men who proved up.[2]

This is the story of some of these frontier women farmers. It starts with the story of Harriet T. Griswold who was widowed on a pre-emption claim in Isanti County when Minnesota was still a territory. It tells the story of Emeline Guernsey, a widow with five children who sold her farm in Pennsylvania to come "west" to Mitchell County, Iowa, in the early days of statehood. And, finally, it tells of Pauline Auzjon and Emma Setterlund, both single, immigrant women who separately homesteaded in western Minnesota. Because she is earliest in time and because the letters her family kept describing her first years in Minnesota make her story the richest in detail, we start with Harriet Griswold.

ON AN EARLY October morning in 1856, Harriet Griswold left her New England home in Somers, Connecticut, to travel to the wilds of Minnesota. Carrying her baby in her arms, and with her three older children around her, she set forth with her husband, Allen. They went north by stage or carriage to Springfield, Massachusetts, and then by train past places familiar to the generations who followed after her—Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Toledo, Chicago, west to the Mississippi River, to the end of the railroad where the steamboat "Golden Era" took them up the river to St. Paul. It was

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[1] Minnesota Homestead Final Certificates, Land Entry Files, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, National Archives Record Group (NARG) 49, National Records Center, Suitland, Md. From a sample of 200 final certificates in the Winona County land office files, the exact ratio was 25 to 6, and this included men when there was any doubt of their marital status. The data base for this article was a sample of 259 Minnesota women; the 2,400 women constitute about 4 percent of all homesteaders who got title to their land in the state during the same time period; Minnesota Final Homestead Certificates, NARG 49.

More than a third of those applying for Minnesota homesteads between 1863 and 1880 had not filed for final proof by 1885. (Cancelled homestead certificates on file in the National Archives have not been examined.) Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, D.C.: Public Land Law Review Commission, 1968), 411; on railroad and state lands, see Gates, 385, 806.

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[2] Declaratory Statement no. 7, Box 531, Fairfield, Iowa, NARG 49; Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage* 4 (Rochester, N.Y.: Fowler & Wells, 1902): 544; Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 1 (Spring, 1976): 68.

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indeed a golden era they were in search of as they reached for the American dream of riches from speculation in the unclaimed lands of the West. And they were not the first.[1]

Never mind that all their worldly possessions, having been sent the cheaper way by water, were probably lost in a gale on the Great Lakes. Forget that Harriet and two of her children were sick. The important thing was that land was selling well and, as speculators, they could expect some of the riches to come to them. They were not dreaming an idle dream. Minnesota was in the midst of a land boom. True tales of 300 percent profits were commonplace. In her first letter home, Harriet relayed the good news in staccato language, echoing the bulletins from Western Union: "Allen . . . is quite pleased with the investment in lots at Cambridge says they are selling rapidly it is thought the land office will be removed there next spring." The land office would bring more settlers in its wake, raising prices still further.[4]

The family survived the first Minnesota winter in the relative comfort of St. Paul, and the spring of 1857 found Allen writing, not of orchards and corn, but of town lots and land prices. Speculative expectations looked very good. "[W]hat was stated by me as to the price six months from that time, has been more than realised. My brother R[alph] B has recently sold at the City of Holyoke Mass. four Lots in Cambridge for $500. G[ilbert] G [*another brother*] has sold in Boston some twenty Lots [for] something less, said he was offered $100 a Lot for one Block of twelve, a part of which had been previously sold I have now nineteen Lots in all, and Paid for, these I hold now at $100 per Lot, about fifty five acres of my claim, lies very finely to plot as an addition, should I conclude to do so after a while, this would make about 300 Lots, however my claim is considered to be the most valuable of any there, it lies very finely on the west bank, of a fine Lake [*Paul's, now Florence*] covering more than 200 acres of land, and joining the town, was offered 12 1/2 Dollars an acre last winter for my farm at Sunrise but hold the same at 20 Dollars, it is only one mile from the flourishing Town of Washington."[5]

The Griswold brothers sold Cambridge lots back East, although Allen bought his Minnesota land from his brother Gilbert only after reaching St. Paul. They sold to people who, in the main, did not intend to come west and live on the land but who, like Allen and his brother, expected to profit as others settled there, forcing prices up. Allen paid $1,980 for his town lots and realized only $870, for a loss of $1,110. However, Allen paid very little for his claim. Under the 1841 Preemption Act, settled farmers had the right to buy the land from the government at $1.25 an acre before it was put up for public auction. Until the land office opened, a family could live on the land free. Better yet, as we learn later, Allen bought a military land warrant, which he could use as if it were currency to pay for the land. These warrants, discounted on the open market, sold for less than the $1.25 an acre that they were worth with the federal government, and Allen probably availed himself of these cheaper prices.[6]

From colonial times, land had been offered as an inducement and a reward to men serving in war. As early as 1776 the Continental Congress offered land (although it did not own any) to soldiers as well as to deserters from the British forces. The British had already done the same to colonists who fought for the Crown. Depending on rank and length of service, veterans were entitled to a certain amount of land. Despite occasional efforts to restrict the sale of these rights, traffic in military land warrants boomed, making rich men out of the likes of Jason C. Easton in Minneapolis who bought and sold them as a business. In 1856 such warrants were issued for almost 17 million acres of land (16,891,890); the next year warrants were used to enter over six million acres (6,283,920). Both of these figures are the largest for any of the years between 1855 and 1876 and consequently show that the Griswolds entered the market at the height of the land warrant business.[7]

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[1] H[arriet] T. Griswold to Brother Henry, Oct. 17, [1856?], Griswold Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul. All Griswold letters cited in this article are in these papers; spelling and punctuation throughout this study follow the originals.

[4] Rodney C. Loehr, ed., *Minnesota Farmers' Diaries: William R. Brown, 1845-46, Mitchell Y. Jackson, 1852-63* (St. Paul: MHS, 1939), 22-23; H. T. Griswold to Brother Henry, Oct. 17, [1856?]. The author has chosen to use first names throughout the text, partly because this clearly distinguishes individuals from other family members, but chiefly because this is an article about women and use of first names clarifies and emphasizes the gender of the person discussed.

[5] A[llen] H. Griswold to Brother Henry, April 18, 1857. Sunrise and Washington are in Chisago County directly east of Isanti. The land dealings of Allen and Gilbert Griswold, whose brother Ralph apparently did not move west, may be found in Deed Records Book A, p. 5-11, 20-21, 51-52, 54, Land Records, Isanti County Courthouse, Cambridge. On early Cambridge, see Vernon E. Bergstrom and Marilyn McGriff, *Isanti County, Minnesota: An Illustrated History* (Braham: the authors, 1985), 49-51.

[6] Gilbert Griswold concluded many more land transactions than did Allen; between February and May, 1857, Gilbert realized over $2,300 on his Cambridge land. Neither brother sold land for cash in Cambridge after May, 1857. Deed Records Book A, p. 5-6, 9-11, 14, 20-21, 25-30, 36-37, 50-51, 91-92 and Mortgage Records Book A, p. 9—both in Isanti County Courthouse. On land warrants, see Gates, *Public Land*, 251-283; on pre-emption, see United States, *Statutes at Large*, 5:435-458.

[7] Gates, *Public Land*, 251, 275, 276, 280. Almost 7 million acres (6,959,379) in Minnesota alone were entered under mil-

In addition to military land laws, before 1841 Congress from time to time enacted pre-emption laws that gave squatters in specified areas the right to buy the property they were already farming before it was put up for public auction. The Pre-emption Act of 1841 extended this right to squatters on surveyed land everywhere, thereby marking a definite shift in policy away from using the public lands to raise money for the federal treasury and toward a policy of using such laws to settle the country. More than simply accepting the reality of squatters with good grace, the Pre-emption Act of 1841 signaled an attempt by the national government to give reality to the Jeffersonian ideal of a republic of independent farmers. The 1841 act was the first to look into the future, to say all those yet to come, including widows, can have 160 acres for $200 if they cultivate the land. Ironically, Jefferson's own administration saw the passage of harsh legislation aimed at driving squatters off the land, laws which were seldom enforced because there was not the manpower to patrol the vast areas of the west and seldom the heart.[8]

AS they had in the past, the settlers themselves often looked to make big money fast through land speculation. So it was with the Griswolds. They dreamt both dreams. They dreamt of owning their own farm in the new land and of the day when the expansion of the towns of Cambridge and Washington would enrich them. Allen wrote that "the prospect for business the present season is now very fine, I think there never has been a time, in our day when a brighter prospect for successful speculation, in Real Estate lay before us, than the present, here in the present Territory and future State of Minnesota." Already Allen had sold 15 of his 36 lots for a total of $770. The benefits to be reaped from combining the pre-emption and military bounty land laws can be gauged by comparing what the Griswolds would pay to what Emeline Guernsey realized on her Pennsylvania farm. She received $4,000 for her working farm in 1858. Under pre-emption, the Griswolds would pay $200 for 160 acres; with a discounted land warrant, they would pay even less.[9]

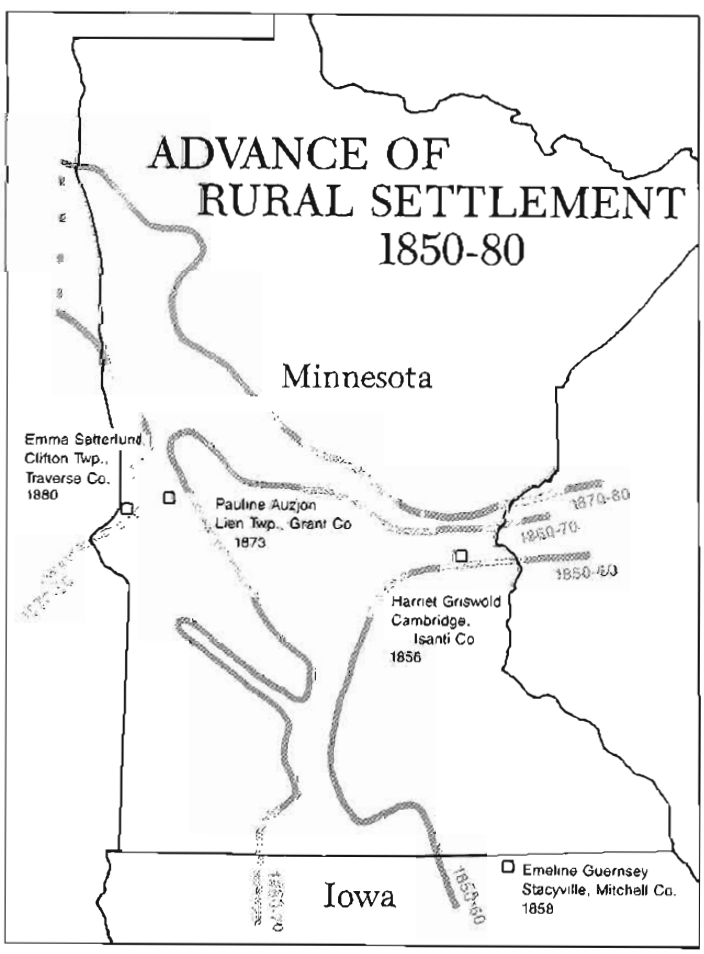
Allen, then, had town lots in Cambridge he believed worth $1,900 with good prospects for an increase in value; he held a claim on the edge of town which he would farm and which he hoped some day to turn into more town lots, possibly as many as 300; and finally, he owned a farm at Sunrise he thought worth $20 an acre because it, too, was close to a growing town. Cambridge was some 40 miles north of St. Paul and nearly 30 miles north of Anoka, the nearest substantial settlement on the Mississippi River. The family of six had lived, presumably from savings, for a winter in St. Paul. So this was not a destitute family but one of some means, means most probably realized from the sale of their farm in the East. It was a family with a right to have hopes for the future. But for the Griswolds, as for many others, time turned dreams into nightmares.

It is difficult to remember as we look back over our country's history that although settlers first came to what is now the United States in 1607, two centuries later most of them were still stuck behind the mountains on the Eastern Seaboard. In the next 50 years they flooded across the rich plains, reaching St. Paul by

itary land warrants through 1871. See also Rodney C. Loehr, "Jason C. Easton, Territorial Banker," *Minnesota History* 29 (Sept., 1948): 223-230.

[8] Gates, *Public Land*, 219-220, 222-240, 431. The sale of public lands accounted for 48 percent of federal revenue in 1836, but only 2 percent in 1861; revenue continued, however, to be a motive for selling public lands.

[9] A. H. Griswold to Brother Henry, April 18, 1857. There is a discrepancy between Allen's figures and the land records; the latter indicate that he was not selling at a profit, at least when his buying and selling prices are averaged; Deed Records Book A, p. 5-9, 20-21, 52, 54. For the comparison, see Emeline Guernsey to William Guernsey, Sept. 2, 1858, in the private collection of Marygray Orcutt Brown, Bloomington. All Guernsey letters cited in this article are from these papers.



1860, then on the western edge of a frontier that ran roughly southward to Fort Worth, Texas. Settlement was fairly solid in southeastern Minnesota and stretched beyond St. Paul, down the Minnesota River to New Ulm, and up both the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers. Isanti County was north of the line of settlement, part of the Big Woods, a region of broadleaf woodlands, coniferous forest, and wooded prairie. The frontier—commonly defined as two people per square mile—had not reached the southern part of the county by the end of the 1850s, but substantial lumbering in the nearby St. Croix Valley created a market for agricultural products. The county itself lay on the edge of profitable farming.[10]

This was the land to which Harriet and Allen Griswold moved in the spring of 1857 with their four children, Arnold, 13, Florence, 9, Frances, 7, and little Albert, 2. Harriet, herself, was 35. The family went to the claim outside of Cambridge, beside the lake. Allen put up a shanty that was 12 feet square as required by the law, and there the six of them lived throughout the summer as they began to farm. In the fall the nightmare began; by mid-September Allen was dead at the age of 44 and the baby very sick.[11]

There appeared to be no thought at the time of Harriet returning to her family in the East. She described the immediate help she received from neighbors and relatives: "Brother Gilbert stopped with us a week and kindly assisted in putting up our cabin which Allen had not commenced when he was taken sick, the neighbours also were very kind both during our sickness and assisting about the cabin which we are sadly in need of for our old one is quite open and cold weather is upon us." Imagine the prospect of a Minnesota winter on a claim first farmed a scant five months before in a county which three years later boasted only 28 farmers substantial enough to be counted in the federal agricultural census. Her letter continued forlornly: "During the week Gilbert was here I had 4 and 5 men to cook for beside our own family and taking care of Albert which I found wore upon me some I am getting quite nervous but I hope I shall not be sick as I was last fall I think if we are prospered we may move into our new cabin the last of this week we have a good crop of beans, but little corn, as the gophers and birds took a good share of it, and I should think we had about a hundred bushels of potatoes. I think I have been remarkably sustained during my affliction but I trust I have the presence of the Saviour and the guidance of his holy spirit but I tremble when I think of the care now resting on me and I fear it will be a burden which I shall not long be able to bear. . . . I very much dread the long dreary winter before us but I hope we shall suffer for none of the necessaries of life so long as Arnold is well he will be able to keep us in wood though we must depend on others to haul it as we have no team."[12]

The only thing we know she asked from her family was their sympathy and "an interest in your prayers." Because she thanked them, we also know they sent a dollar or even five dollars occasionally in their letters to her. With the help of these sporadic gifts, Harriet kept the family fed and clothed and managed the farm. To supplement her income she took in boarders, mirroring the frequent pattern of colonial days when farmers added a trade or craft to their farm income, a pattern repeated on the frontier by male as well as female farmers. "[W]e had ten men to stop over night with us besides our family and Mr. Shepard [*her regular boarder at the time*], they were lumbermen going into the woods, to drive logs down the river I got supper and breakfast and a lunch for their dinner to day. . . . I have 2 bedsteds up stairs and then I make up a camp bed on the floor up stairs where the men all sleep we have had very few callers this winter Mr Odell who lives about 2 1/2 miles above here keeps all he can and to induce people to stop with him offers to keep them cheaper than I do."[13]

Lumbermen, immigrants, fur buyers, new settlers all stayed with her. In the bitter cold of January that year she reported "6 teams loaded with provision passed here one day bound for Superior 3 of them stopped with me over night." At one point she briefly kept the post office, but it was boarders who were the mainstay of her second income after farming.[14]

Having no team, Harriet hired men to plow the land, paying between $1.50 and $2.00 an acre, helping in turn other struggling farmers to add to their meager incomes. Later when she did have a team she still hired men to do the heavy plowing and other difficult labor such as building a split-rail fence around the cultivated land. Fencing was necessary to protect crops from both

[10] Gilbert C. Fite, *The Farmers' Frontier, 1865-1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 2; John G. Rice, *Patterns of Ethnicity in a Minnesota County, 1880-1905. Geographical Reports* (Umeå, Sweden: University of Umeå, 1973), 17; Loehr, *Farmers' Diaries*, 12. It was not until 1930 that 30 percent of Isanti County was under cultivation; with the retreat of the agricultural frontier in Minnesota in recent years, that is no longer true. John R. Borchert and Donald P. Yaeger, *Atlas of Minnesota Resources and Settlement* (St. Paul: State Planning Agency, 1968), 23, 35.

[11] United States Census, 1860, Minnesota manuscript schedules, Isanti County (township not listed), 60, 61, microfilm copy in MHS. This census erroneously lists the third child as Harriet, but the letters are written by Frances to her grandmother in Connecticut.

[12] Harriet to Father and Mother, Oct. 24, [1857].

[13] Harriet to Father and Mother, Oct. 24, [1857], Mar. 30, [1858 or 1859]. Shepard was a land surveyor.

[14] Harriet to Brother Henry, Jan. [no day given, 1858 or 1859].

*A LOG CABIN such as this may have housed Harriet Griswold and her children near Cambridge, Isanti County.*

wild and domestic animals who were generally not penned at this time. Arnold, barely a teenager at his father's death, supplemented this labor with the help of his sisters, all under the supervision of Harriet.[15]

As there were no schools, Harriet had few options. We know she sent her daughter Florence to school in Anoka, where she might have helped in a home in return for part of her board. The other choices were to teach the children at home or move the whole family to Oak Grove, a town some miles to the south in Anoka County, for the winter so that they could attend school. Providing education was a problem on the farming frontier.[16]

But mostly Harriet farmed and made decisions about the land. The second spring of her widowhood she wondered "will it be best to let the land warrant go for a team if homestead bill passes [?]" She could sell her land warrant, which she was planning to use to pay for her pre-emption claim, to buy a team—an important capital improvement for any farm; this she would do in the hope that the homestead bill, under which she could claim the land free, would pass. Later that spring, Harriet "came to the conclusion that we could not get along without a team and as I had an opportunity to get a horse here, I thought best to do so, for the Land warrant and $25 I bought the horse, harness, and Sleigh or the Sleigh was thrown in." Without the means to buy a wagon, however, like many other farmers she still had to pay hauling and freight for everything that came in and went out of the farm.[17]

UNFORTUNATELY Harriet was widowed just as the depression of 1857 hit, destroying most expectations. By 1859 she wrote in a vein very different from her husband's early letter: "Could I sell the improvement on the place for any amount I should be tempted to do so and go where we could have the advantages of a school . . . but we can sell nothing now for no one has any money Mr Carlton sold his house and all his improvements for a yoke of Oxen valued at 60 dollars and he moved up here the spring we did." As land prices did not recover from the depression, gone were the early dreams of turning part of their claim into 300 town lots. Indeed, none of Allen's Cambridge lots were sold after May, 1857. Eventually the town of Cambridge was replatted slightly to the north of the original site. Harriet could no longer look forward to a more pros-

[15] Harriet to Brother Henry, Jan. [no day given, 1858 or 1859]; to Father and Mother, Mar. 30, [1858 or 1859]; to Father, June 27, [1858 or 1859]; Arnold to Grand Father, May 8, 1859. See also Loehr, *Farmers' Diaries*, 15.

[16] Harriet to Brother Henry, April 29, [1858 or 1859]; Florence to Grandma, Dec. 19, 1859; Arnold to Uncle Henry, Jan. 20, 1860; Frances to Grandpa, enclosed with Harriet to Father and Mother, Dec. 19, [18??]. There are two letters from Frances, one spelled with an "i," the other with an "e." In the sample of 259 Minnesota women homesteaders between 1863 and 1889, 85 percent of all women who had been married are known to have had children; 5 percent of the women said their children were grown; of those who gave the number, 59 percent had one, two, or three children, although a few (6 percent) had eight, nine, or ten. Minnesota Homestead Final Certificates, NARG 49.

[17] Harriet to Father and Mother, Mar. 30, [1858 or 1859] and to Brother Henry, April 29, [1858 or 1859]. See also note 38, below.

perous future based on land profits. Now it was a question of just hanging on.[18]

Harriet and her neighbors did not own the land. What they sold, or thought of selling, were the improvements to the land—the clearing and plowing, and the buildings that had been put on it. Until the land office opened, their claims were safe, as Harriet described: "[I]t is still said the lands are coming into market and those who wish to hold their Claims must pay for them before the 16th of May." The land sales were repeatedly put off, but so were her early dreams of quick profits from speculation. By the fall of 1861, five years after she came to Minnesota, Harriet was still worrying. "[I]f I could sell the horse could very easily get a land warrant but I see no chance of selling him at present the land sale comes off next week and I must run the risk of loosing [*sic*] my claim." In fact, the wheel had come full circle when in 1860 Harriet questioned whether the land was worth investing in at all. "[H]ave not paid for our claim yet. have been hesitating whether it would be best to invest any more in Cambridge property as it does not seem to pay." Later she confessed, "have sometimes thought it hardly worthwhile to enter it as we must then pay taxes on it." This dilemma was not an unusual one for frontier farmers. Property taxes were the main source of income for local government. For farmers struggling to create new farms with little cash income, taxes were high and they had to be paid in hard cash. On the other hand, if title were not gained, someone else could buy it at public auction, and all the improvements and the investment in time and money would be lost.[19]

Harriet continued to farm the land at least through the early 1860s; she never owned it, although probably she or Allen had filed a pre-emption claim. Most of the heavy work was hired out, but Harriet likely worked in the fields with the children at harvest. It would be easier to harvest her own fields than the wild cranberries she described, probably one of her cash crops. "[T]he marshes where we pick are about 4 miles from here and are very wet the water being about a foot deep all over them, we start soon after breakfast and get home about dark Florence can ride horse back but I do not dare."[20]

From the start they farmed commercially, growing corn, oats, rye, and potatoes. Wheat, oats, and potatoes were exported from the state before the Civil War, but Harriet's soil was too sandy for wheat. She kept track of the market. In 1858 or 1859 she wrote, "I hear wheat has risen from 50 and 55 cts per bushel to 70 and 75 and 80. . . been told potatoes sell for 15 cts per bushel corn about 30." And later, "have sold our corn." Produce was shipped by river, at least from Anoka. Perhaps Harriet used the Rum River, a mile to the west of her claim, to freight small loads. Besides cash crops, some of which were for her family's own use, Harriet had a garden of "Musk melons, cabbages, Tomatoes, squashes, onions, turnips, carrots, etc." In the spring of 1859, Arnold wrote "our Cow has got a nice calf . . . and Mother thinks she will buy 1 or 2 pigs." Later they had hens as well and Frances described the outbuildings: "our cows stable is covered with coarse hay on top and turfed up the sides and the barn where we sometimes keep horses is built of logs and covered with hay."[21]

As the children got older, more of the farm work fell to Harriet. She wrote, "Florence was gone till the last of Sept so I have a good deal of work to do out of doors. . . Arnold is gone a good deal which brings all the care on me."[22] Arnold left to harvest cranberries or husk corn, and Florence, too, may have been out working as a hired girl or she may have been visiting. Later, Arnold thought of enlisting in the Civil War. This pattern of children leaving in their mid- or late teens was not an unusual one. Often it was the youngest son who stayed to take over the farm.

Harriet complained a lot, but then she may have had something to complain about. As we have seen, a neighbor undercut her price for boarders; other boarders left for parts unknown before paying their bills; she was passed bad money; and the man Florence boarded with in Anoka sold a watch for Harriet and went off to Pikes Peak taking the proceeds with him. And she never did get the sleigh which was "thrown in" with the team. "Mr Abbott seems to be serving me a mean trick as well as some others, I had paid him all up except $7. on the note he held against me when he left, the cutter which was included in the bargain was at Anoka and as he went down to St. Paul he sold that to another man so that he means to cheat me out of that

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[18] Harriet to Brother Henry, April 29, [1858 or 1859]; Loehr, *Farmers' Diaries*, 23; Bergstrom and McGriff, *Isanti County*, 51. The Panic of 1857 began in late August.

[19] Harriet to Brother Henry, Mar. 12, [probably late 1850s]; to Father, Oct. 17, [probably 1861]; to Father and Mother, with Arnold's letter to Uncle Henry, Jan. 20, 1860, and Feb. 24, [186?]. There is a reference in Harriet's letter to Henry, Oct. 16, [1861?] to "the man who took my place," but this letter is from Cambridge and concerns farming. On farmers' methods of borrowing against taxes to raise capital, see Robert P. Swierenga, *Acres for Cents: Delinquent Tax Auctions in Frontier Iowa* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976).

[20] U.S. Agricultural Manuscript Census, 1860, Isanti County, 13, microfilm copy (frame 274) in MHS. Preemption entry books for Cambridge for this date are lost. Harriet to Father and Mother, Sept. 14, [1858 or 1859].

[21] Loehr, *Farmers' Diaries*, 21; Harriet to Father and Mother, Sept. 14, [1858 or 1859] and Dec. 19, [18??], including Frances to Grandpa; Arnold to Uncle Henry, Jan. 20, 1860, and to Grandfather, May 8, 1859.

[22] Harriet to Brother Henry, Oct. 16, [1861 or later].

entirely."[23] Here it is clear that Harriet not only sold her farm products commercially but she bought large items partly on credit, giving her personal note for them.

Harriet had more to bear than the work and worry about money. After the first or second harvest on her own, she wrote in very Victorian tones, "It is a question in my mind whether it is my duty to stay here a great while longer. sometimes it seems rather hard that we must live so entirely shut out from the world as we do." In the same letter she brought up the matter of going back East: "have been advised to go back east but whether it would be best even if it were possible I do not know, hope our duty will be made plain to us and that we shall perform it faithfully." Possibly the same year she wrote: "and the thought again comes up must we always stay here?" An obvious choice, besides keeping a boardinghouse in town or returning to her parents, was marriage. She broached the subject, but without much enthusiasm, again putting the ultimate decision on an external force called "duty." Like many women once married who have some semblance of economic independence, the risks as well as the benefits of marriage were all too apparent. "What would you say were I to tell you I have some thoughts of changing my name I am sure I do not know what is for the best and fear were I to do so it might be for the worse, hope I shall be guided in the path of duty."[24]

We do not know whether Harriet Griswold remarried or not. In the sample of 259 of the women homesteaders, who were widowed after they came to the land as Harriet was, one in ten remarried before she made her final homestead proof, normally in five years or more. But we do know that Harriet stayed unmarried at least until the early 1860s. In 1860 she was one of 28 farmers in the entire county on the United States Agricultural Census where her farm of about 135 acres with 10 under cultivation was valued at $1,000—a very large amount for that time and place.

Twenty-three of the 28 farms were 160 acres, the maximum size allowed under the pre-emption laws.

[23] Harriet to Father, June 27, [1858 or 1859].

[24] Harriet to Father and Mother, Sept. 14, [1858 or 1859]; to Brother Henry, April 29, [1858 or 1859]; to Father, Oct. 17, [probably 1861]. See also Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984), 26.

[25] Statistics are from U.S. Agricultural Manuscript Census, 1860, Isanti County, 13.

[26] Glenda Riley, *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 86; Joan M. Jensen, *With These Hands: Working Women on the Land* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1981), 108.

[27] Data shown is from Minnesota Homestead Final Certificates, NARG 49. Out of the sample of 259 women, 68 homesteaded in the central region; complete information for each woman in this sample was not provided.

Table 1. Isanti County Farms at the Beginning of its Frontier Period, 1860[25]

| | Number | High | Low | Average | Harriet Griswold |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Improved acres | 28 | 60 | 4 | 20 | 10 |
| Total acres | 28 | 165 | 33 | 153 | 133 |
| Value of farm | 28 | $2,000 | $330 | $837 | $1,000 |
| Horses | 9 | 2 | 1 | 1.33 | 1 |
| Cows | 26 | 8 | 1 | 2.3 | 1 |
| Oxen | 15 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Pigs | 27 | 13 | 1 | 5.9 | 2 |
| Value of livestock | 27 | $515 | $12 | $202 | $105 |
| Potatoes—bushels | 28 | 400 | 25 | 153 | 125 |
| Corn—bushels | 27 | 500 | 20 | 128 | 40 |
| Butter—lbs. | 23 | 500 | 25 | 200 | 125 |

Eleven farms (almost 40 percent) equaled the value of Harriet's farm, the census taker thought. Of these, two were valued at $2,000 and nine at $1,000, with no valuations in between. One farmer had no livestock, and the farmer with the most livestock did not grow corn, the second major crop in the county after potatoes. Butter was a big cash crop, usually produced by the women; single male farmers without women probably bought butter from their neighbors.[26] Harriet produced four bushels of peas and beans and six bushels of buckwheat, besides harvesting 20 tons of hay. Although her farm was valued at $1,000, which was more than the average, Harriet's production fell below the average. Perhaps cash crops such as the wild cranberries that the family gathered were included in the total value of the farm; perhaps the buildings were more valuable than most, although from their descriptions that seems unlikely; perhaps the farm was more accessible to travelers who brought cash income as lodgers.

The acres cultivated are a basic measure of the extent of farming. Harriet's fell below the average in comparison to women homesteaders who came after her in the central region of the state.

Time may be the crucial factor here. Data on Harriet's farm comes from 1860, and the census, taken in the late spring, is based on her farming from 1859, when only three seasons of crops had been raised. Data on the

Table 2. Comparison of Harriet Griswold and Women Homesteaders in Central Minnesota[27]

| | Harriet Griswold | Sample Women Homesteaders | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Average | Number in Sample |
| Size of farm | 133 | 131.1 | 67 |
| Acres cultivated | 10 | 14.4 | 66 |
| Age | 38 | 49 | 22 |

later women homesteaders gives the number of acres cultivated at proving-up time, at least five years after settlement—1868 at the earliest.

After the early 1860s when the letters from Harriet which have come down to us stop, we lose track of her. Mobility was very high on the frontier, and it was not unusual for settlers to move on after a few years.[28]

EMELINE GUERNSEY had a very different story, although she migrated west only two years after Harriet Griswold did. The latter inherited a pre-emption claim and worthless town lots; Emeline Guernsey moved to Iowa as a widow of almost six years with the financial resources to buy a farm. Not only did she have such assets; she had technical experience and competence in running a farm as well. She had a working farm in Pennsylvania which she had operated since her husband Peter's death in 1852. But she had done a good deal of the managing before that as Peter, a superintendent on the railroad, had been necessarily absent from the farm. She settled in Stacyville, Mitchell County, Iowa, near her sister and brother-in-law and where other siblings farmed from time to time. Although she arrived at about the same time Harriet did in Isanti County, conditions were less rugged for her; Iowa was settled earlier than Minnesota, and she had more capital. Mitchell County, however, was still frontier in 1858. The land records only begin in 1854, and land was still being bought from the federal government in the 1860s. Emeline was 39 when she arrived, only four years older than Harriet, with five children ranging in age from William (called Willie) who was 18 years old to Emma, born after her father's death, who was five.[29]

Stacyville, only about five miles south of the Minnesota border, was part of the prairie woodland, making it more profitable farming than the more heavily wooded Isanti County. Emeline, who traveled west to Iowa to farm as a widow, typifies almost half (48.3 percent) of the women homesteaders in the Minnesota sample of 259. This is by far the largest category. A third of the women were, like Harriet Griswold, widowed after they were on the land but managed to stay and carry on the farming themselves.

Despite the fact that she had two older sons—Henry was 14, one year older than Arnold Griswold—Emeline, like Harriet, not only made the farming decisions but found that as her children grew older, they left the land and the farming to her. In 1858 before she left Pennsylvania, she wrote to her son Willie, already out in Philadelphia where he apparently worked on the railroad as many of the males in his family did: "Well Willie, I have sold out at last, to a man by the name of Swan. . . . He bought last tuesday, is to pay $4000, $2000, down, and the remainder . . . next March. Although this is less than I was to receive . . . I consider it a much better bargain, as I have it all in money, and get more down. I am to give possession immediately. . . . Uncle John says I may go into the house where Aunt Ann lived until the crops are all gathered, and I can dispose of them. another reason, I forgot to mention, why I think this a better bargain than the other is, because I now have my share of the crops." And although she asked Willie's advice, she intended to make all the preparations herself. "I should be glad if you were here to assist in disposing of things but think it will be better for you to remain there, if you keep well, until a week or two previous to our starting."[30] And so she sold the furniture and the livestock and prepared to go to Iowa late in the fall of 1858.

*EMELINE GUERNSEY, about 1875*

Emeline speculated in land as well as farmed. But she was more successful than Allen and Harriet Griswold, partly because she had more farmland than town lots, partly because it was rich soil unlike the more marginal land of Isanti County, and perhaps partly because she could hold the property longer and so was less affected by the Panic of 1857. Almost imme-

[28] A study of an Iowa county shows two-thirds of the pioneers listed in the 1850 census did not appear in the 1860 census; in another Iowa county only 27 percent of pioneer families remained between those years; Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 81-82.

[29] Guernsey family genealogy, Guernsey Papers.

[30] Emeline to Willie Guernsey, Sept. 2, 1858.

diately on arrival in Iowa, in December, 1858, she bought 480 acres with those land warrants Harriet Griswold so often worried about. All this land had already seen two owners, although no deeds are recorded in Mitchell County before 1854. She bought 320 acres from a group of speculators from Decorah, Iowa, for $600 and an additional 160 acres for $333 from an individual who in turn had bought the land from a single seller less than two years before for $200.[31]

Like the Griswolds she also bought town lots, nine lots for a total of $200. By 1861 she had sold 160 acres to one of her younger sisters, Amelia, and in a separate deed, 80 acres to Amelia's husband, Homer Stacy. The total price Emeline realized from the Stacys was $850, a profit of $400. She sold another 80 acres in 1866 back to its former owner, one of her younger brothers, Erasmus, for $440, a hefty profit of $290. Although research did not uncover more than one sale of a town lot, in general, investment in Mitchell County land was profitable for Emeline. Like Allen Griswold, she clearly was not afraid to put her capital into land, one of the commonest and probably also one of the safest investments before extensive industrialization.

With two sons, 14 and 18 years of age, Emeline might have expected an easier time on her farm in Iowa than Harriet, widowed with younger children in Minnesota, but the Civil War came and Willie enlisted in 1861 and Henry followed not long after. Not only was she left again with all the management but, as the war went on, few men were left to hire to do the heavy farm work and many wives were alone to compete for their services. Early in the spring of 1862 Emeline wrote, "I have engaged some barley . . . for seed, and I think it would be well to have considerable corn planted, and potatoes enough for our own use." In February, 1864, after storing her wheat over the winter she wrote, "Mr. Fuller is going to Mitchell tomorrow with a load of wheat for me. . . . He has been once with a load today. There are some men there buying wheat, and paying 60 cents per bushel, (Greenbacks). . . . The load I sent today will a little more than pay my taxes, after paying for the hauling."[32]

At the war's end Willie, who spent almost four years telling his mother that he could not wait to be home with her and his three young sisters and that he would be contented there forever, returned to Iowa but did not stay long. By 1866 he was back East, working for the railroad, trying to pay back some of the money his mother had loaned him, and putting the responsibility for the farm on his brother, Henry. "Does Henry have any trouble in keeping along. I sometimes fear he cannot keep all things going. then think he can do better than I for I cannot take the interest one should in such things. he seems to like farming and I hope will prove master of it."[33]

Henry may or may not have proved master of farming, but he too did not like it. He married and went to Oregon where he worked as a sawyer and manager in a sawmill. In 1872 he wrote from Eugene City, "if they can get a Sawyer they will give me the Overseeing of the whole and not have me do any work in particular I consider my place [job] worth more to me than any farm I ever saw."[34]

The girls, too, began to marry and leave and there was talk of Emeline selling the farm. Although both sons would have liked to use her money, it is clear the decisions were hers and that she had substantial property to make decisions about. In 1872 Henry offered suggestions to his mother: "I wrote you a few days ago about selling out and may be sayed to mutch you know I am very apt to you must not be influanced by me against your own wishes for if you had rather keep the Place I would rather you would but I thought you mite be glad to get rid of the care but if you wish I will see that you have all the debts paid and you can keep the place if you like. I can pay the debts in a few months more I guess so you had [better] not sell on that account I only thought I could make your money do you more good with less care but I guess if you did not owe anyone your care would be some what alayed so you must do as you like and pay no attention to me for I am old enough to take care of my self." We know that at least some, if not all, of the debts were Henry's as there are references in the letters to Emeline paying his notes for him. It is unlikely that he ever found the money to pay most of them back.

In a similar vein, Willie wrote, "I do not know what to say . . . in regard to your going to Osage. I would advise you to come here, before doing anything with a view to locating again. . . . In regard to location—I do not know of any more desirable place. . . . But I do not wish to influence—Come and see for yourself. . . . What do you think of my proposition for your money? If you come here to live you can put in all your money & we will divide the spoil if you wish."[35] Henry wanted her to invest in lumber and Willie in his yet-to-be-established coal and wood business.

She did sell her farm in the fall of 1872 to a John Holbach for $3,600. She may then have been living in town as she stayed in Stacyville for some years, then

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[31] Here and below, see Village Deeds, Book B, p. 371, 372, and Book C, p. 472; Deed Record Book C, p. 630, 698, Book G, p. 122, Book H, p. 281, Book I, p. 413—all in Land Records, Mitchell County Courthouse, Osage, Iowa. Stacyville was named for Homer's brother Fitch.

[32] Emeline to Willie, April 9, 1863, Feb. 10, 1864.

[33] Willie to Emeline, Oct. 24, 1866.

[34] Here and below, see Henry Guernsey to Emeline, June 30, 1872.

[35] Willie to Emeline, Dec. 10, 1872.

went briefly to Illinois with her daughters, but was back in Stacyville in the 1880s.[36]

EMELINE GUERNSEY and Harriet Griswold were both old-stock Americans, who had been married. But single and immigrant women also settled on the midwestern frontier, and their numbers increased with time. In the 1860s only five percent of the sample of 259 women homesteaders in Minnesota were single; by the 1880s almost 29 percent were. This increase reflected the growing independence of single women as the century progressed and perhaps also the increasing numbers of women who remained single throughout their lifetimes. Through the 1880s, 45 percent of the single women in the Minnesota sample were immigrants.[37]

The Homestead Bill, which gave impetus to this western settlement, had passed in 1860 but was vetoed by President James Buchanan. Under Abraham Lincoln, who ran on a homestead platform in 1860, the bill finally became law in 1862. Anyone could apply for a homestead who was over 21, was a citizen of the United States or who had declared his or her intention to become a citizen, and who was the head of a household. Consequently, from the beginning, homesteading was open to single and widowed women as well as to single, married, and widowed men. To gain title to the land, an applicant had to prove that he or she had lived on the land and cultivated it for five years.[38]

Minnesota was the first big homestead state; only 8 percent of the state land had been offered for sale before the legislation. For the next six years, formative years for the state, Minnesota led the nation in homestead entries—44 percent in 1865. Thereafter land sales and later still railway sales (railroads held one-fifth of the land in Minnesota) widened the gap, but still it is estimated that about two-thirds of Minnesota farms originated as homesteads.

Pauline Auzjon was one of the single, immigrant homesteaders. She emigrated from Norway in June, 1869, and four years later in November, 1873, the 53-year-old woman filed a homestead application in Grant County on the frontier of west-central Minnesota. It is possible that she abandoned an earlier claim, for when asked her previous occupation, she replied farming. On her final proof she said, "I lived there as a single woman together with my widowed sister." Perhaps some cultivation had already occurred on the land as she said, "I waited on cancelation for former Homestead." In any case, she had settled on the land a year before making her homestead application. Pauline may

[36] Deed Record Book R, p. 63, Mitchell County Courthouse. Other data on Emeline's life was gleaned from reading through the Guernsey Papers.

[37] Minnesota Homestead Final Certificates, NARG 49; Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, a Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 190-191.

[38] Here and below, see U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 12:392; unlike the 1841 Pre-emption Act, the 1862 legislation made it clear that single women as well as widows could claim land. During the 1860s most new farms in Minnesota, unlike those in the rest of the nation, were homesteaded; Gates, *Public Land*, 401, 411; Fite, *Farmers' Frontier*, 16, 20, 23.

*A WOMAN FARMER and her children, near Jasper, Pipestone County, 1889*

have emigrated with her sister and brother-in-law and he may have died in this country; it is more likely, however, that her sister left Norway after she was widowed, since she inherited no claim from her deceased husband.[39]

By 1880, at the time of final proof, Pauline had 18 acres under cultivation and a log house 14-by-15 feet with a lumber addition. The farm was valuable enough to appear on the 1880 agricultural census where she was listed as the owner of 20 acres tilled (including rotation), five acres in permanent pasture, three in woodland, and 135 unimproved acres. The agricultural census gave the value of the farm as $1,200 for the land, fences, and buildings; $40 for farm implements; and $100 for livestock for a total value of $1,340. The value of farm implements varied considerably among farmers who were her neighbors and was not directly correlated to the number of acres cultivated. Clearly some farmers invested in expensive new farming machinery, and probably hired themselves out to work on their neighbors' fields.[40]

The need for hired labor was not directly correlated to size or value of the farm. Pauline, like six of her nine neighbors, used hired labor during the previous year. Pauline paid helpers for 14 weeks; the range was from 5 to 25, so she ranked somewhere about the median. She sowed one acre to oats and harvested 24 bushels; 20 acres to wheat for 400 bushels; and one quarter of an acre to potatoes for 30 bushels, probably for her own use. Clearly wheat was the primary cash crop as it was for most of her neighbors. This was typical for farmers in Minnesota. She harvested 20 tons of hay, about average, and had two working oxen, two cows, two calves, and four other cattle; she also had one pig and seven chickens that laid 25 dozen eggs. Pauline made 150 pounds of butter, another of her cash crops, though most farms had made more.[41]

Once the final proof was made, Pauline started paying property taxes on her farm, valued for tax purposes in 1881 at $653. Her land steadily increased in value for five years, reaching $893 in 1887 when she sold her homestead to Robert Beach for $1,280. (Actually the sale did not take place until June 21, 1887, although 1886 taxes had already been transferred to Beach.) By then the taxes had dropped a little from the high of $23 yearly to under $17, not insignificant sums in those times. From census and tax records, it is clear that this was very much a working farm; in fact, in 1883 Pauline bought an adjoining 40 acres of railroad land, but by 1888 that also had been transferred to Robert Beach.[42]

When she sold, Pauline carried the mortgage of $1,112, almost the total purchase price. This debt was probably due in three years, when a new mortgage for $1,200 was written for both the original homestead and the railroad land. Short-term mortgages were common at this time. In the spring of 1898 a third mortgage was taken out for both pieces of land, this time for $1,500. Beach paid this off in 1903 after Pauline's death. More than the original sum was still owing, $1,567.50, although the interest payments over the years would have been an important source of income to Pauline. It is an indication of the lack of capital on the agricultural frontier that for the 16 years Robert Beach owned Pauline's land, he had paid off virtually none of the purchase price. Pauline still lived in Lien, Grant County, when she died at about 82 years of age, in a small house attached to the house of a friend, Hansine Bartness. Her estate was divided among her scattered, extended family: the bulk went to her two married nieces, one in Minneapolis and the other in Fergus Falls, and large bequests went to her infant grandniece, Pauline Auzjon Torgerson, and her grandnephew, Martin Solensten, both in Terente, South Dakota.

Although she did not continue to farm her homestead—Pauline was, after all, 66 years old when she sold—it was a valuable asset for her, providing an income that, in turn, meant independence in her retirement years. There was nothing unusual for both men and women, particularly toward the end of the 19th century, to use homesteading as a means of creating capital for other uses.[43]

EMMA SETTERLUND, like Pauline, was also an immigrant from Scandinavia. She emigrated with her

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[39] Rice, *Patterns of Ethnicity*, 17. All quotations of Pauline Auzjon's final proof are from Final Certificate No. 2962, Minnesota Final Homestead Certificates, NARC 49. The 1880 census does not list the sister, but the homestead record, given in full sentences, would seem more accurate. U.S. Census, 1880, Minnesota manuscript schedules, Grant County, Lien Township, 24, microfilm copy in MHS.

[40] On qualifications for inclusion in the agricultural census, see *Senate Documents*, 56th Cong., 1st sess., no. 194, p. 173 (Serial 3856). On farm machinery, see Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 148-168.

[41] Fite, *Farmers' Frontier*, 49. The figures are somewhat inconsistent; the breakdown of Pauline's crops on the agricultural census adds up to more than the total tilled listed there, and this in turn was greater than the total claimed for the same year on the homestead final proof.

[42] Here and below, see Real Estate Tax Books, Lien Township, 1881-1886, Treasurer's office; Deed Record Book C, p. 309, Book F, p. 136, Book G, p. 52, 240, Book J, p. 136, Book R, p. 394, Book Z, p. 283, Land Records, Probate Records—all in Grant County Courthouse, Elbow Lake.

Twenty-or thirty-year mortgages as we know them did not exist at this time; the extremely short term of the mortgage was more a guarantee that the lender could sell the land if the buyer defaulted than an expectation of full payment by the stated date.

[43] Fite, *Farmers' Frontier*, 19-20, 46.

family from Sweden when she was about 12 years old. Nine years later, in 1880, the same year Pauline was proving up on her land, the 21-year-old Emma made a pre-emption application for 160 acres of prairie land in Traverse County. Because ownership came sooner under the pre-emption law and because requirements were less stringent, settlers continued to make pre-emption claims under which they paid $1.25 an acre, even though homestead land, except for small filing fees, was free. Emma applied for the same type of claim Harriet Griswold had made more than two decades earlier in Isanti County. As the line of settlement moved west from Grant to Traverse County in the 1880s, Emma became a frontierswoman.[44]

In July, 1883, perhaps when payment was due, Emma filed a homestead claim that superseded her pre-emption application. Homesteaders had six months before they had to live on their land, and Emma delayed committing herself; but by October she hired carpenters to build a 12-by-14-foot house, and on December 1, 1883, she moved in. Times were difficult for her. She had not put a crop in that summer nor did she put one in the next summer. Perhaps she simply lacked the capital for further investment after paying to have her house built, or perhaps homesteading was a means to gain capital rather than to have an ongoing farming operation. She explained on the homestead proof that she was away the following winter from the last of November, 1884, until the first of April, 1885, "for the purpose of earning money to purchase the necessaries of life and to improve my land." The next winter she was away for two weeks "just before Christmas" again working. Emma "worked at house work and sewing in Morris, Minn. in the family of a man by the name of George Munroe, and in Minneapolis, sewing for different people, boarding with a family by the name of Johnson." Emma had not worked away from home before homesteading; she lived with her parents in the same county, though in a different township on land which very likely they either pre-empted or homesteaded. When asked her earlier occupation, she had replied, "I assisted my parents on their farm."[45] By the late 19th century many homesteaders, both men and women, worked off the farm for a livelihood.

Homesteading was financially attractive to Emma as an alternative to living with her parents and working for them on their farm, or being live-in domestic help, or finding enough sewing in the city of Minneapolis to make a living. She may have done less of the actual farm work herself than Harriet Griswold because we know that she hired the grain farming work done although she kept a couple of chickens and one or two cows. Probably the land had never been cultivated before, although it is difficult to be certain. In any case, Emma cultivated four acres in 1885, five acres in 1886, six acres in 1887, and ten acres in 1888. Her wheat crop increased through the same years to 39 bushels. By 1887 she was also growing garden vegetables. In 1886 and 1887 wheat prices were "between 50 and 60 cents" a bushel, rising steeply to "around 90 cents" in 1889.[46] Still, even if she sold all her wheat, in 1888 Emma would have made only $35. No doubt she used some of the wheat for her own flour. With milk, butter, cheese, eggs, chicken, and vegetables to eat, she should have been able to keep herself in food. Salt, sugar, and tea would have to be bought but very little else. Her profit was small, but domestic servants were paid little beyond their keep and it is unlikely that she could have earned more from sewing after paying board and room.

Emma may have bartered services and goods with her neighbors, exchanging her butter and sewing or domestic help for plowing or harvesting. Further, Emma could expect the land to appreciate in value, especially with her improvements. She described her house as "Built of fine lumber as follows: Studding 16 inches apart. Weather-boarded paper over that and sidded. Papered and oiled inside, shingle roof. Matched floors . . . one window. The house is painted outside. House sits on stone foundation. House is worth at least $200.00. Barn 10 × 12 built of fine lumber worth about $25.00. A few trees around the house in good growing condition, set out by myself, worth at least $15.00. About 10 acres of land broke and under cultivation, worth at least $5.00 per acre, a good well of water worth $10.00 at least." All this, she thought, made a total improvement of $300 beyond the value of the land. Inside the house she had "one bed and bedding, one cook stove, one table, three chairs, dishes, cooking utensils and all other necessary household articles." It was important to report these items as proof that the necessities of life were present on the homestead. Despite the fact that she hired much of the work done, Emma, when asked her occupation at final proof, replied "farmer."

Emma proved up her claim in November, 1888, and although she did not receive the patent from the United States government until March, 1891, the land was now hers, ready to be taxed, mortgaged, or sold. In 1889 Emma began to pay real estate taxes; the county assessments over the next few years indicate the fluctuation of land values in western Minnesota at that time. Emma's land never reached the value of Pauline's land. The valuations were: $400, 1889; $640, 1890; $672, 1892; and $588, 1894. In 1892 when her land had its

[44] Rice, *Patterns of Ethnicity*, 17.

[45] Information on Emma Setterlund and all quotations about her are from Final Certificate No. 5926, Minnesota Final Homestead Certificates, NARG 49.

[46] On wheat prices at this time, see Fite, *Farmers' Frontier*, 88.

(4—369a.)

# HOMESTEAD, PRE-EMPTION, AND COMMUTATION PROOF.

## TESTIMONY OF CLAIMANT.

Full and Specific Answers must be given to each Question. Evasive Answers will be Fatal to the Proof.

Emma Letterlund, claimant, being first duly sworn, testifies as follows:

Question 1.—What is your correct name, age, and occupation? If employed by any person, state by whom.

Answer. Emma Letterlund. Age 29 years. Occupation farmer.

Ques. 2.—What is your post-office address?

Ans. Post-office address is Wheaton, Traverse County, Minn.

Ques. 3.—Are you the identical person who made ~~pre-emption filing No.~~ _____ (or homestead entry No. 7973) at the Fergus Falls, Minn. land office on the 25th day of July, 1883, and what is the true description of the land now claimed by you?

Ans. I am. It is the N.E. 1/4, section 12, Township 127, Range 46

Ques. 4.—Where did you live before settling upon this land, and what was your occupation?

Ans. In town of Clifton, Traverse County, Minn. I assist on my parents farm in that town

Ques. 5.—Are you a citizen of the United States, or have you declared your intention to become such?

Ans. I am a naturalized citizen of the United States.

(In case the ~~party~~ is of foreign birth, a copy of his declaration of intention to become a citizen or full naturalization certificate, officially certified, must be filed with the case. The latter is only required in final homestead entries.)

Ques. 6.—Are you interested in any other entry or filing than the one upon which you now seek to make proof?

Ans. I am not

Ques. 7.—Have you ever made a pre-emption filing for any other tract of land, or made any other homestead entry or filing or entry of any other kind? (Answer each question separately, describe the land, and state what disposition you made of your claim.)

Ans. I have never made any other filing or entry of any kind, except a pre-emption filing on this same land in 1880.

Ques. 8.—Is your present claim within the limits of an incorporated town or selected site of a city or town, or used in any way for trade and business?

Ans. No

Ques. 9.—What is the character of the land? Is it timber, mountainous, prairie, grazing, or ordinary agricultural land? State its kind and quality, and for what purpose it is most valuable.

Ans. It is gently rolling prairie land. Black loam soil with Clay sub-soil. It is most valuable for Cultivated purposes

Ques. 10.—Is the land valuable for coal, iron, stone, or minerals of any kind? Has any coal or other minerals been discovered thereon, or is any coal or mineral known to be contained therein? Are there any indications of coal, salines, or minerals of any kind on the land? If so, describe what they are.

Ans. None to my Knowledge

highest valuation, the southwest quarter of her section (Emma had the northwest quarter) was sold for taxes. The other parts of the section were not taxed, presumably because they were either not owned or they were being homesteaded or pre-empted and title had not yet been gained to them. Emma's taxes that year were $18.68, a general tax of $10.62 and a school tax of $8.06. The county was the taxing agent, passing collected funds up to the state and down to smaller units of government. Relatively, school taxes were very high. Usually land sold for taxes could be redeemed within a three-or five-year period, and often the sale was simply a means for farmers to divert for a few years the little cash they had from taxes to capital improvements.[47]

Throughout this period, Emma was not assessed on the personal property of her farm so that it appears that either her farm operation was very small, or that she continued to work out of town for the major part of her living, and/or that she kept the farm only as a capital investment. But we know that she did keep it until she died. She kept the land free and clear for five years when she took out a mortgage from Thomas A. Morse for $300—about half the land's assessed valuation—at 6 percent payable in three years.

Five years later and ten years after making her homestead proof, Emma, now 39, married Peter Peterson of Anoka County on March 26, 1889. The Reverend E. Schold performed the ceremony in Traverse County where Emma still had many relatives, but the couple lived in Anoka until Emma died five months later on August 6. Her husband was her only heir. The next winter her mortgage was paid off, over four years after it was taken out, either by Emma's widower or by her estate. Her husband remarried, and he and his new wife sold Emma's homestead in 1903.[48]

WHAT, then, is the profile we can draw of women farming on the upper midwest frontier from the late 1850s through the 1880s? We know that they were there at all times and in all regions. Although the amount of heavy labor they did varied, letters and testimony on homestead records tell us that most women made the day-to-day decisions on their farms and did much of the work.

The four women in this study approached the dream of owning land by the various routes available in 19th-century America. In Minnesota Territory and the states of Iowa and Minnesota—in woodlands and on open prairies from the 1850s to the 1870s and 1880s—they pre-empted land, bought land, and homesteaded. Young and old, both financially secure and precarious, widowed or single, from the eastern United States with Anglo-Saxon names and from Scandinavia, these women sought a life for themselves and for a time, at least, they found it.

Harriet, Emeline, Pauline, and Emma were not alone. All about them women were out farming on the frontier. Even more women were to follow them, taking up land in the Dakotas. In American legend, sturdy, young men conquered the West. But women were beside them, some as wives, others farming on their own. This is the tale of some of those who farmed alone—forgotten Persephones, lost too often from our memories, buried, it would seem, beneath the very ground they farmed.

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[47] Real Estate Tax Books, Treasurer's office, Traverse County Courthouse, Wheaton; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, 187; Swierenga, *Acres for Cents*, especially chapter 7.

[48] Mortgage Record Book 7, p. 286, Book 10, p. 575, and Marriage Records, both in Traverse County Courthouse.

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*MARY CONROY, who built and occupied this Clay County claim shanty about 1910, is an example of the women farmers who moved west with the shifting settlement frontier.*