

PETER TESTMAN'S ACCOUNT OF HIS EXPERIENCES IN NORTH AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

In the study of the European backgrounds of the American immigration of the nineteenth century it is of no little importance to examine the vast advertising movement which carried the story of the United States to all parts of the Old World. Norway offers an excellent illustration of the main phases of this movement. When the nineteenth-century emigration from that country began in 1825, the people of Norway knew very little about trans-Atlantic conditions. Not only was the country to a considerable extent isolated from the rest of Europe but the people themselves, because of geographical barriers and lack of easy means of communication, were divided into groups differing considerably in customs and dialects, many of them to an astonishing degree isolated. The letters which came from emigrants who had dared the perils of the journey across the Atlantic and into the American interior were practically the only available sources of information about the New World in the twenties and early thirties. They were read with keen interest by those who received them, and were then copied and recopied, carried from one farmhouse to another, and gradually disseminated throughout whole districts. "America letters" they were commonly called, and not infrequently they gave rise to a burning desire to emigrate, a spirit which was appropriately termed the "America fever." Not until 1838 was a printed handbook of information about the United States made available. This book was Ole Rynning's *True Account of America for the Information and Help of Peasant and Commoner*, a valuable work written in Illinois by an immigrant of 1837.¹ In the

¹ This book was published in Christiania under the title *Sandfærdig Beretning om Amerika, til Oplysning og Nytte for Bonde og Menigmand*. An English translation of it appears *ante*, 2: 221-269.

late thirties and early forties a number of books and pamphlets relating to America were published in Norway, and soon the printed records of personal experiences were supplemented by advertising pamphlets issued by states, railroads, land companies, and other organizations which, for one reason or another, desired to stimulate the emigration.

The immigrants and travelers whose writings were circulated throughout Norway did not consciously fit their testimony in with all that had been said and written before. They sent back their own independent versions of things seen and heard, and the result, taken as a whole, was a report on a grand scale to the people of Norway. Naturally there were on the one hand, errors and exaggerations as a result of undue optimism, while on the other hand hardships and discouragement sometimes resulted in reports unwarrantedly pessimistic in tone. The readers in Norway in many instances were thus able to compare the reports of both the successful and the unsuccessful immigrants, and thus to see both sides of the situation.

Peter Testman, a tinner in the city of Stavanger, Norway, emigrated in the spring of 1838, together with two brothers and three other men. He took the route via Bremen and New York, and under the leadership of the veteran emigrant guide, Cleng Peerson, journeyed to the little Norwegian settlement in Shelby County, Missouri, the site of which had been selected the year before by Peerson. As a result of his experiences in this pioneer community, Testman decided to return to Norway, and this he did in the spring of 1839. His journey took him to the Fox River settlement in Illinois and to Chicago, and then east by way of the Great Lakes, the Erie Canal, and the Hudson River. In Norway he wrote a small book in which he told the story of his adventure.

Testman returned to Norway empty-handed and disillusioned. His book naturally presents a somewhat gloomy picture of America. As an antidote to the books which were painting America in colors altogether too bright and thus

raising expectations which could not be fulfilled, Testman's narrative doubtless served a useful purpose. He showed that the American streets were not paved with gold. He warned the Norwegians that the long journey was fraught with perils and that its financial cost was heavy. He pointed out that the dreams of the emigrants were too bright. That he had unfortunately gone to the least successful of the Norwegian settlements in the West he did not realize, and his account is undoubtedly one-sided. As a vivid and detailed first-hand record of an emigrant's experiences, however, it is of considerable value to that increasing number of students who are subjecting the history of American immigration to close study. The title of the book in the original is *Kort Beskrivelse over de vigtigste Erfaringer under et Ophold i Nord-America og paa flere dermed forbundne Reiser; af Peter Testman, Blikkenslager* (Stavanger, 1839. 27 p.). The only known copy of the original is in the public library of Bergen, Norway. A transcript of it was made for the Minnesota Historical Society by Mr. Gunnar J. Malmin, who succeeded in finding the original in Bergen after a careful search in Norwegian libraries. Students of Norwegian immigration owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Malmin not only for finding a copy of the Testman pamphlet but also for bringing to light many other rare emigration documents.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

[TITLE PAGE]

A Short Account of the Most Important Experiences During a Sojourn in North America and on Several Travels Connected Therewith; by Peter Testman, Tinner. Stavanger. Printed by L. C. Kielland. 1839.²

² Miss Anne H. Blegen, editorial and office assistant on the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, has coöperated with the editor in making the following translation. In the final revision much help was received from Dr. Grace Lee Nute, the society's curator of manuscripts.

[TEXT]

The emigration from Norway to the United North American Free States began fifteen or sixteen years ago, after that from the southern European countries had already been in progress for a long time. There has been a remarkable increase in the last years, chiefly, perhaps, because of the alluring tales which earlier emigrants, during visits to their native land, have told about the glories of the country in which they now have resided for several years. The reliability of these stories, moreover, was strengthened considerably by the many letters which these visitors usually brought with them from the Norwegians in America to their relatives and friends in Norway, letters which contained, almost without exception, the same praise for that foreign and distant land. All this naturally, in the case of a number of people, wakened the desire to seek their fortune in the much lauded regions where so many of their countrymen — and among them their own kin and friends — found themselves in such happy circumstances. They were strongly encouraged, furthermore, by the visiting emigrants; and from this time emigration began to increase in a marked degree.

A long-nourished desire to view that country and if possible to settle there became a definite determination in my case also, as a result of so many pleasing accounts, for I believed that by means of agriculture and cattle-raising I could find there an independent and pleasant livelihood.

With that purpose in view, early in the spring of 1837 I gave up my business in Stavanger, where I had hitherto resided; but since I was hindered by a number of unforeseen circumstances from availing myself of the opportunity to go on the sailing vessel which departed for New York in the summer of that year, I remained here until the next spring, that of 1838.³ Together with two of my brothers and three other

³ Two emigrant ships sailed from Norway directly to New York in 1837, one from Stavanger and the other from Bergen. See *ante*, 2: 224, 243.

persons I set out from this place early in May and took the route via Bremen, in the expectation of securing readier sailing accommodations across the sea to New York. In this hope we were disappointed, however, as we had to wait there fully three weeks and in the meantime pay high prices for board and lodging. During this sojourn I had an opportunity to observe the German land at Bremerhaven — to which we had come — and along the river Weser as far as Bremen.* The region was everywhere well tilled and thickly settled and afforded a pleasing sight to the eyes. Although it was only the beginning of the month of June, the fruitful fields of rye were already headed. I was almost astonished at the size of the cattle which were grazing upon a great, rich plain. According to report, some of them are equal in weight to three good head of cattle of ours, and they give up to twenty quarts of milk at a time.

We finally left Bremerhaven on a new fast-sailing brig of that port, which was loaded exclusively by and with passengers from different parts of Germany. Head winds caused the captain to alter his original course and to steer north of Scotland. We soon had to experience the inconveniences and privations of our situation. Since such a great number of people were packed together in a small room, the air became very foul and unwholesome; and in addition to this the food for which we contracted on board the ship was nearly always so salty that we could eat only a little of it, especially as we were not apportioned as much fresh water as we needed; not to mention many lesser inconveniences.

After about eight weeks' sailing we arrived without mishap at our first destination, New York. We had cruised, with slight exception, against an almost incessant west wind, and we were now glad that we were to be freed, as from a prison. A large decked boat or barge came to fetch us and it took us first to a large floating wharf equipped with various appliances

* Bremerhaven is a seaport town thirty-eight miles north of the city of Bremen.

for the washing of clothes, where all our baggage was inspected. That which was found to be unclean was not permitted to be taken ashore until it was washed. When this had taken place, we were transported by the same boat to one of the wharves on the southern side of the city, where a great crowd of people, who were already assembled, at once swarmed about us seeking to earn something by driving or carrying our things. A large number of innkeepers also crowded in upon us to offer us lodging. The pressure and tumult were so great that we could hardly work our way forward. We were not able to give the necessary attention to our baggage, and we were very fortunate, for, despite this fact, we lost nothing, although the belongings of the different passengers were thrown carelessly into the hold of the boat after the inspection and were now carried in wagons to different parts of the city. We Norwegians put up at a simple inn; nevertheless each person had to pay five-eighths of a piaster a day for board and lodging. (A piaster or dollar is equal to one hundred cents or, in Norwegian money, one hundred and twelve skillings silver.)

We stayed in New York five days in order to get our affairs arranged. I did not see anything remarkable as compared with any other large city, but a railroad, which went out from the northern end of the city, with its steam carriages, attracted my attention. This contrivance was the first of its kind that I had seen and I was therefore curious to view somewhat more closely both the carriages and the road. Consequently I decided to take a little trip on it. With several members of my party I therefore entered one of the coaches in the row, and it took us less than half an hour to rush out to the northern corner of the island upon which the city is built, a distance of somewhat more than eight English miles. This road was a double one, so that while the coaches on the one side left the city, those on the other side returned to it. The road was laid out nearly level, all the rough places through which it passed having been cut through. Much

labor has been spent especially on a mountain which was bored through to a distance of about three English miles. For a fairly long stretch the mountain stood like an arch over the railroad and formed a so-called tunnel. When we had reached the northern end of the island, where the coaches stopped, we got off and undertook a ramble afoot in order to observe the country roundabout, and we found then that the soil everywhere had to be fertilized and well tilled in order to yield its fruits. We discovered here some ruins of small fortifications from the time the Dutch occupied this region, which doubtless had served as a defense for them against the savage inhabitants of the country.

Our aim was to secure a piece of land from which, through farming and cattle raising, we could earn our living. To attain this end we had to proceed farther into the country. In the vicinity of New York, as a matter of fact, only a little land was available, and that at a price of more than three hundred piasters per acre. (An acre is about equal to a Norwegian *tönde* of land.)⁵ On the day before our departure from New York we met one of our countrymen who was among the first emigrants from the western part of Norway. He was just now on a trip from the western states and was about to return home. He encouraged us to accompany him, and he described the state of Missouri, where he lives, as remarkably beautiful and glorious. We agreed to accompany him to that place, and I especially because of securing in him a guide and an interpreter, since he had traveled much in all the northern states and talked English with considerable fluency.⁶

⁵ A *tönde land* is a Norwegian measure of land, 56,000 square feet.

⁶ The guide was undoubtedly Cleng Peerson. See Theodore C. Blegen, "Cleng Peerson and Norwegian Immigration," in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 7:321 (March, 1921), and R. B. Anderson, *First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration*, 187 (second edition, Madison, Wisconsin, 1904). Testman's narrative makes it clear that Peerson did not accompany the Testman party from Norway to America, nor did this emigration occur in 1839. On both points the new evidence conflicts with the traditional story.

On a big barge with a roof over it, which with five others was tied fast alongside a steamer, we journeyed up the Hudson river to Albany, a distance of a hundred and fifty English miles. From that place, after our baggage had been weighed, we went on board a canal boat to continue the trip through the Erie Canal. The cost for every hundredweight through this canal was ninety-one cents. When this freight charge was paid by the passengers the boat was pulled in upon a huge set of scales which hung deep down in the water. The latter was then let out by means of locks, and the boat, with all its cargo, was weighed in order to estimate the canal tolls which the skipper had to pay. Such a canal boat can carry from one hundred to a hundred and fifty barrels; others, which carry cargoes only and no passengers, can generally hold double that amount.

The boat on which we traveled was drawn night and day by two horses, but we did not go forward very rapidly, as the horses had to advance at a walking pace all the time because of the great cargo. The so-called packetboats, however, which likewise pass through this canal — carrying passengers only — have three horses and go more than twice as fast, but the freight charge on the latter boats amounts to four times that paid on the former. At the many cities through which the canal passes freight was either loaded or unloaded, and this caused some delay in our trip. Provisions at these places were fairly expensive: one pound of butter cost from eighteen to twenty-five cents, one pound of pork twelve to sixteen cents, one pound of meat eight to ten cents, one quart of milk six cents, one loaf of bread — not more than enough to make a meal for one person — six cents, and other things in the same proportion. After six days had passed we reached Rochester, which is situated 270 English miles from Albany, and we stopped a couple of days with the few of our countrymen who lived there. Our party was increased at this place by several of these Norwegians, so that in all we numbered twenty-two persons. Nearly all those who thus joined us were in

poor circumstances and were in part prevailed upon to accompany us by our guide. We arrived next at Buffalo, which is situated ninety-three English miles from Rochester at the eastern end of Lake Erie, where the canal ends. Here we went aboard a large steamboat, which was going all the way to Chicago, in Illinois, a distance of about a thousand miles by sea. Our guide, however, persuaded us not to go there, since our baggage would still have to be carried a hundred miles farther by land, and this transportation would be very costly as no railroad had been built from the latter place. When we arrived at Cleveland, in the state of Ohio, 193 English miles from Buffalo, we again went aboard a canal boat in order to continue on our way through the Ohio Canal and thence, by way of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, to our destination in Missouri. To this change in our traveling plans I was opposed for a long time, because I had learned from printed accounts that nearly all the North American rivers had very low water in the dry season — in which we found ourselves just now, and were therefore difficult to navigate. The outcome showed that this was in truth the case, as I will relate more fully below. The Ohio Canal runs from north to south, for the most part through unsettled, wooded stretches of country, which, however, have already been bought up by rich men for purposes of speculation. This is the reason why the land still lies so uncultivated.

As long as our journey lasted on this canal, which is 306 English miles in length, we did not experience any special difficulties; but when we had reached Portsmouth, where the canal ends, we at once had a very laborious task to perform, combined with considerable outlays of money, in order to convey our baggage to the steamer on the Ohio River, since the Scioto River, which we had to cross for that purpose, was so low that the canal boat could not navigate it. We all had to begin now to unload from the canal boat the many chests and packages — some of them very heavy — and to load them up, again on wagons, on which they were carried to the

banks of the Ohio River, where of course we had to repeat the same arduous labor in order to get them over into the steamboat. We now had before us a distance of 619 English miles on this river before we could reach the Mississippi, into which it flows. The Ohio is ordinarily navigable for steamboats from Pittsburg down its course for a distance of more than 970 English miles to its outlet, but this is not the case in the dry season. This time the river was so very low that we were grounded more than twenty times, and on these occasions we had to unload all our baggage onto barges and thereupon move out to the deeper places in the river, where in turn we reloaded them onto the steamboat as soon as it had worked itself loose, and this it often failed to do until after exertions lasting from twenty-four to thirty hours. At two places, however, it proved absolutely impossible for the boat to cross the shoals, and therefore we were forced to transfer, with all our baggage, to other steamboats which lay below the shoals. As a consequence, the freight charge was double the amount it would otherwise have been for the entire distance from Portsmouth to St. Louis, not to speak of provisions, with which we had to supply ourselves for so long a time, because of the delays of the journey, that the amount was five times greater than planned. Contrary to expectations, provisions became in part even more costly the farther we advanced into the country; thus, for example, the price of milk increased until it was doubled and potatoes cost from three to four piasters per barrel.

As the summer heat during all this part of our trip was so oppressive that we perspired even while sitting still, it was inevitable that many of our company, as a result of such incessant and hard exertions — in which the sweat completely soaked through our clothes — should be taken sick. One after the other was confined to his bed, and as a result the difficulties and labors of those who could still keep on their feet were still further increased. This fate overtook even some of those who had already lived in America nearly three years

and had earlier survived hard attacks of sickness as a result of the unaccustomed climate. It was natural that the desire to see an end of all these troubles grew with every day, and this longing was finally fulfilled when we left the Ohio and came into the Mississippi River.

Before I go further in this report of my journey, I will merely remark for the benefit of the uninformed (for whose sake especially I am, in fact, writing this account) that one can go from Baltimore all the way to Pittsburg on a railroad 250 miles long and thence on steamboats down the Ohio River to Portsmouth, where, as I have said above, I began my trip on this river. As several of the German seaports, including also Bremen, carry on a not unimportant trade with Baltimore, this route is often used by the immigrants from Germany, who likewise wish to settle in the interior of the United States; but it may perhaps also be recommended to the Norwegians who seek the same region, partly because the entire distance from Baltimore to Portsmouth is more than four hundred miles shorter than the route from New York to that place, and partly because of the very much shorter time required for the trip, for one does not need more than twelve or fourteen hours to traverse the above-mentioned railroad to Pittsburg.

When we left the Ohio and came into the Mississippi, as I have mentioned above, we found to our great astonishment that the volume of water in this river had risen to an unusual height, so that, as we were later informed, it had even flooded several cities situated on its banks. The cause of this, it was supposed, must be either the breaking up of the ice or an unusually heavy rain at its sources in Canada. On this river we now had to put behind us a distance of more than three hundred English miles. On the way we had to spend a couple of days in St. Louis waiting for further means of conveyance; but this stay gave us, meanwhile, an opportunity to make a few purchases which we needed for the housekeeping we were soon to begin, for this large commercial city

was the last which we were to pass by. Here our guide parted from us, since he, together with another person, had gone outside the city to visit a Norseman from Trondhjem living there, and he did not return from this trip before the steamboat which we took had left. This separation caused us no trouble now, however, for a map of the North American Free States rendered us the same service with regard to the route. We reached Hannibal — a little town in Missouri on the banks of the Mississippi, 132 English miles north of St. Louis — about one and one-half days after we had left the latter place. We had scarcely put our goods ashore and under shelter and arranged our simple sleeping quarters — after several hours of work in the middle of the night — when the two persons who had been left behind in St. Louis also arrived. From here we now had sixty miles to travel by land before we could reach the place in the state of Missouri upon which we had decided as the goal of our journey. For this purpose we hired two large wagons, each with two teams. This conveyance was very inadequate, however, and it caused us difficulties on account of the many sick persons, all of whom had to ride on the wagons despite the fact that the baggage took up nearly all the space; and still this means of transportation was the most expensive we had had up to this time, as it cost us eight piasters a day. This high price we were required to pay not only for the trip out but also for the return journey of the drivers themselves, the cost for both trips being computed and paid according to the time which they required on this trackless route. As a natural consequence, all those who were moderately well had to walk. At last we came to the cabins of the Norwegians (for there are as yet no houses), which stood in a row one after another for a stretch of five English miles at the edge of a little wood.⁷ The sick were distributed among the cabins.

⁷ This settlement in Shelby County, in northeastern Missouri, was an offshoot of the Fox River settlement in Illinois. It was founded in the spring of 1837 by a party of twelve or fourteen Norwegians. An

But we now lacked everything which could serve as nourishment both for us and for them, yes, almost the chief necessities of life, with the sole exception of Indian corn, the meal of which is used for bread which is very dry and not very firm, about like the barley at home; for the little supply of provisions which we brought with us was soon distributed and consumed. All the Norwegians here were in poor circumstances, so that we were barely able to obtain some butter and milk — and even that was possible only at the beginning, for when the winter began there was no more to be had either here or from the Americans who lived nearest to us. Two of the sick died after a short time and the others recovered but slowly.

At this time (the month of October) a public sale fixed by Congress was held of the lands hereabout, but none of the Norwegians, with a couple of exceptions, were wealthy enough to redeem even a part of the piece of land which they had taken into use and to which the users themselves have the right of purchase if they can pay cash money. Most of them, therefore, had to move on again to uncultivated land and begin over again without any compensation for the improvement which

immigrant of 1836 who came to the Illinois settlement has left an account of the circumstances which led to the Missouri venture. He and a number of other Norwegians who came to America in 1836 were greatly disappointed with the situation in Illinois. Toward the spring of 1837, he writes, "we hired a man from the Stavanger district, one of the first emigrants, Kleng Pedersen Hesthammer, who understood the language and had considerable knowledge about conditions in the country. This man made a journey of investigation for us and reported that he had found land on the west side of the Mississippi River which, in his opinion, was sufficient and good." About the beginning of May, 1837, these settlers moved to the Shelby County settlement. See Sjur Jørgensen Haaeim, *Oplysninger om Forholdene i Nordamerika*, 2 (Christiania, 1842). There has been some difference of opinion concerning the success of the Missouri settlement, but there is no doubt that it was not on the highways of population expansion in the upper Mississippi Valley and that after a few years it began to disintegrate. That Missouri was a slave state did not add to its popularity as a site for a Norwegian settlement. Missouri attracted few Norwegian settlers; many of those who went there soon moved north into Iowa and some returned to Norway.

they had made on the land save what the buyer would voluntarily grant them. That they can ever in this way become owners of a piece of land, even supposing that they are permitted to occupy it five or six years before the auction of it is held, is hardly believable, for a man finds it difficult to earn more than he needs for the necessary support of himself and his family, and it therefore becomes impossible for him to hire workmen. Some of my countrymen who lived at this place told me frankly both of the trials which they themselves had endured and of the fate of the earlier Norwegian immigrants. The latter had in their time bought land on credit about thirty English miles from Rochester, on the shores of Lake Ontario.⁸ They had suffered exceedingly from sickness, especially in the beginning, and this set them back considerably in their external circumstances. It is true that after one man had taken it upon himself to seek aid for them they received not a little help from the Americans residing in the vicinity, but a large portion of their gifts unfortunately went up in flames when a fire broke out in the house in which they were kept. The little aid which was again given them was far from sufficient to relieve the great distress, and they had to contend with straitened circumstances for a long time before their condition was somewhat bettered. In recent times property there, as well as in every place where population increases, has risen considerably in price. As a consequence several of these Norwegians not long ago sold their possessions and received fifteen or twenty times the amount they themselves had paid, discharged their debts, and then went to the state of Illinois, where they bought for themselves more extensive and better lands at the price fixed by Congress and in addition they also procured cattle.⁹ They are now in fairly good circumstances, whereas nearly all the

⁸ This is a reference to the western New York colony which was established by the Norwegian immigrants of 1825.

⁹ One of the New York settlers, Gjert G. Hovland, in a letter written on April 22, 1835, gives some particulars on this point: "Six families of the Norwegians who had settled in this place sold their farms last summer and moved farther west in the country to a place which is called

later Norwegian immigrants must support themselves by heavy day labor, and this they seldom endure very long as they nearly always become ill as a result of the hot climate, which wrings from them an unusually intense perspiration, the loss of which they must make good, after a fashion, by drinking cold water immoderately. The sicknesses arising from this cause usually carry off many people, and such was especially the case the summer I spent in America. According to some reports, in the short period of three months from forty to fifty of my countrymen in La Salle County alone are said to have died and of the whole population in that county not less than fourteen hundred people.

In all the places through which I traveled by land, the soil appeared to be more or less fertile. In the Mississippi Valley the mould was as deep as six feet at some places and was very rich. When I came outside this valley I found it only from one-half to one and one-half feet deep and less rich; nevertheless it yields different kinds of grain for several years in succession without needing fertilizing. This is the case also at the place in Missouri where I stayed, which was situated fifty English miles west of Palmyra. Here maize and buckwheat thrive remarkably well and wheat and rye indifferently; the two latter grains succeed better in the more northern and eastern states, however, as the summer heat is more temperate there. The crop of oats is ordinarily small and is used only for fodder; barley very seldom thrives. The state of Missouri is especially suitable for raising cattle and hogs, since the fields are suited by nature for that purpose not only because of the

Ellenaais. . . . I sold my land last summer, in July, 1834, and by the transaction earned in cash the sum of five hundred dollars. I have now decided to buy one hundred and sixty acres, an amount which can be paid for with two hundred dollars. The eight Norwegian families still in this neighborhood desire to sell their land as soon as they can, and to move west." A transcript of this letter, which was written to Torjuls A. Mæland, made from the original in the church archives of Ullensvang, Norway, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The entire letter is translated into English in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 2: 68-74 (June, 1922).

luxuriant wild grass, which grows by itself everywhere, but also because of the fairly large amount of fruits fallen from the trees, which lie in the woods.

The stretches of woods usually follow the course of the rivers and brooks and traverse, with them, the great plain of which the country is composed. The most common tree which the forests of Missouri as well as those of the bordering states contain is the oak, of which there are a half score of different kinds; this tree ordinarily attains a good size, for the circumference of the trunk not seldom measures from three to four ells and it produces the most suitable material for building. Quite often, furthermore, one comes across a tree called the hickory (*Hokry*), the trunk of which is somewhat thinner and straighter than that of the oak, and it attains the same height as the latter. It produces a fruit which has a striking similarity to our walnuts, the kernel having the same appearance and taste as these. The wood of this tree is used chiefly for fuel and possesses the excellent quality, not found in other kinds of wood, of burning just as well in the newly cut state as when it has been dried out. The so-called black walnut tree is also found, though in much smaller quantity, its wood, on account of its great similarity in the appearance to the mahogany (*Mahognyen*), being used mainly by carpenters for furniture. Somewhat more frequently, especially in the state of Ohio, one meets with a fourth kind of tree, known as the sycamore (*Secimor*), which in circumference as well as in height considerably surpasses all the above-mentioned kinds, as the trunk sometimes attains a diameter which approaches twenty feet, which consequently makes a circumference of about sixty feet. The wood, which is white in color, is usually cut up into boards.

Despite the fact that most regions to a greater or less degree are well supplied with building materials, still it seldom happens that any of the immigrants are able to provide themselves with a respectable dwelling house. The reason for this condition must be sought partly in the unusually high wages — a

result of the fact that there are not many workers skilled in the building business — and partly in the circumstances that the prices of all tools required for this work are generally from three to four times as high as they are here in Norway. The expenses of the journey and the cost of the land and of the most necessary implements for its cultivation swallow up ordinarily the largest part of the fortune which they brought with them from Europe, and they have to use the part that remains to supply themselves with food and clothes until the cultivated land can provide them with the necessary subsistence. This good fortune falls to the lot of but a very small number of them, however, for most, upon their arrival at their destination, must at once for lack of money try to provide for their maintenance by coarse and heavy labor. And even if they are able in this way, because of the high wages, to earn a little more than a common laborer in Europe, the necessities in food and clothing, on the other hand, are much more costly over there than among us.

Of the different kinds of game found in the woods may be mentioned particularly: deer, which are somewhat smaller than ours and can be met with all the year round; turkeys and several kinds of chickens, which likewise are found at all times; geese and swans and the like, which, on the other hand, are found only in the spring and the fall. Of beasts of prey there is only a kind of small wolf about the size of a fox, which, strangely enough, does no damage to the cattle.

It is worth remarking, further, that as natural riches one finds not infrequently very considerable stores of wild honey which is not inferior in good taste to that gathered by tame bees. Since so many tracts of land are not yet settled and therefore lie altogether uncultivated, the right is consequently open to anyone to take possession of what he can discover in that respect. These finds have often been so great that it has been possible at one place to fill with honey a vessel of the size of an anker. This naturally has caused many to take up bee-keeping, which is generally carried on with very good success.

I have remarked above that as soon as we arrived at the place to which our guide led us we had to struggle with many wants and privations. Thus it came about that I, as a newcomer, through ignorance was beguiled into buying at the above-mentioned auction a piece of land which — as I learned afterward and therefore too late — was of such a nature that I could not, with any security, have the hope of gaining my future livelihood from it. The time from my arrival until the auction was held was in fact so short that, owing to other business, I did not get time personally to examine the property, which consisted for the most part of woods, and for this reason I was forced to accept guidance and advice from others. Their assurances were founded on the belief that all the remaining usable land to be put up at auction had already been taken into use by native Americans who, owing to their better circumstances, would doubtless know enough to avail themselves of their prior right of purchase. This idea, I learned later, was wrong, for after the sale had been held it was discovered that at a distance of not more than four miles from us there was a not inconsiderable stretch of good land, some of it with woods upon it and some without, which had not yet been taken into use by anyone. Since I, according to the conditions of the auction, had immediately paid the government the purchase price for the piece I bought and in this way had been parted from nearly the whole of my little fund of cash, it was now impossible for me to get another and a better piece of land without first having sold and received the money for that which I had already bought. This I did in fact, but I had to agree from time to time to delays in the payments. In a plight such as the one in which I now found myself I had to learn, all too soon, that nothing remained for me but the choice either of gaining my daily living by ordinary work for strangers or else of using the few skillings that I still had left to defray if possible the expenses of my return journey to Europe. As I did not feel strong enough in this unaccustomed climate to be able to choose the first, the decision ripened more and more within

me to return to my native land, and to this resolution other circumstances at that place also prompted me. These were in part of a kind not equally oppressive to everyone, nor are they ascribed any great importance; but in my case they soon were rather specially felt. As a result of the free and almost lawless state in which all the inhabitants of the North American Free States outside the cities live, regular churches and appointed ministers are equally scarce, and the few places where there perchance may be found houses for public worship and ministers chosen by the congregations themselves are extremely few and very far apart.

In the following year, 1839, at Easter time, after having lived in the state of Missouri for a period of six months, I set out upon my return journey and was accompanied by my two brothers as far as the banks of the Mississippi, whence they again returned to their places of residence. After a trip of a day and a half on a steamboat down the river, I reached St. Louis, where after a stay of two days, in order to meet a Norseman who had settled in Illinois and who likewise intended to return to his native country, although only for a visit, I took another boat which went back a short distance to the mouth of the Illinois River and continued the journey up this entire river. I was forced to take the roundabout route which I have described because the first steamboat on which I embarked was bound for St. Louis. The journey up the Illinois River presented to the eye an unusually expansive and beautiful view. Nearly everywhere its banks on both sides were very low and vast boundless plains which were entirely bare of woods bordered directly on the river, which in the rainy season not seldom floods whole stretches of land and makes them in many places uninhabitable. When we had only seventy English miles left of our trip on this river, we had the misfortune of having the paddleshaft of the steamer suddenly break in two, so that we were barely able — and that only by using the one wheel — to reach the nearest bank. I as well as the other passengers had to wait here for the arrival of another steamboat which was

just then expected. We all embarked upon it and in the course of several hours arrived at a little town called Utica, where I went ashore. From here I went on foot a distance of twenty-two English miles to the place where my prospective traveling companion, in addition to a great number of other Norwegians, lived.¹⁰ Here I met also some of the Norwegians who had emigrated by way of Bergen two years before and who first settled farther south in Illinois at Beaver Creek, but who, after student Rynning and many others died as a result of the unhealthy climate, fled from their houses and lands after having lost nearly everything they owned.¹¹ Since I had left my baggage in Utica, I turned back again the following day with oxen and wagon to fetch it. Meanwhile the news of my arrival had spread among the Norwegians employed in the public canal work. Several of these came running to meet me on the road, partly to hear news from their homes and partly to give me information about their varying conditions and circumstances; and not a few of them expressed regret for having left their native land.

After a stay of six days I departed in company with my new traveling companion from the little Norwegian colony just mentioned, which is situated twelve English miles north of the outlet of the Fox River into the Illinois River, and we continued our journey overland sixty-five English miles northward to Chicago. On this trip we traveled seven English miles across a plain which, as far as the eye could see, was so flat that it almost resembled a lake. It is said that this plain is covered with water the greater part of the year, but it is not so deep but that one can make one's way through it with horses and wagons. About in the center of the plain stands a lonely inn to receive and lodge travelers and to direct them on their way. Chicago is a city founded fairly recently, which is still growing

¹⁰ This was the Fox River settlement in La Salle County, Illinois. A brief account of its establishment is given in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 7: 318-320.

¹¹ For an account of the Beaver Creek settlement see *ante*, 2: 226-228.

rapidly owing to its favorable commercial location on Lake Michigan, a circumstance which in time will certainly make it a connecting or central point for the important trade between New York and New Orleans when the canal between the Illinois River and Lake Michigan, which is under construction, is completed. Since it is necessary to cut through a terrain of only 110 English miles in length, which is very suitable for digging, the entire project in all probability may be expected to be completed in two or at the most three years, and then a transportation route will be opened which will exceed in length all others of this kind; indeed, perhaps there will never hereafter be another like it in all North America, since, by a continuous water route one can travel from New York by way of the Hudson River, the Erie Canal, Lakes Erie, Huron, and Michigan, and the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers all the way to New Orleans, near the Gulf of Mexico, a route which can be estimated to be a distance of 3,100 English miles. In addition to the above-mentioned canal, the construction of a railroad running parallel to it is also being undertaken, in order to provide a means of communication by land.

Though Chicago not more than five or six years ago consisted of only a few simple log houses, one can now see there more than four hundred respectable buildings on foundations, a fact which sufficiently indicates its rapid progress. Here we awaited the arrival of a steamer from the eastern states which was to transport us across the three lakes, Michigan, Huron, and Erie, to the city of Buffalo on the shores of the last-named lake. During all this portion of the journey practically nothing worth noting happened, except that during our journey on Lake Michigan we were compelled, because of a hard storm, to put in one night at a harbor, where a considerable supply of firewood was taken on for running the engine; and that I had an opportunity, upon the trip through the river which unites Lake Huron with Erie, to view the nearby city of Detroit which at the present time is still the most considerable of all the commercial cities situated on these lakes. After a trip of ten or eleven

days we arrived safely at Buffalo, where we at once resumed our journey by a canal boat through the Erie Canal to the city of Albany. I now had a better opportunity than upon my first trip to examine closely this remarkable canal, which not far from Buffalo passes through a mountain for a stretch of nearly eight miles, where it has been necessary to dig the channel step by step. At the end of this mountain, where the course of the canal leads down a fairly steep hill, it has been necessary to build four locks with double accommodations, so that one boat can pass down the locks while another goes up, without obstructing each other. This gigantic work is said to have cost about three million piasters. Indeed, at two places the canal was constructed above fairly wide rivers at a height of twenty and thirty ells from their water levels, and the canal itself, as well as the huge pillars — erected from the bottom of the river — upon which it rested, were put together with rough-hewn square stones joined with water-tight cement; from a distance these pillars gave the canal the appearance of a bridge. On a stretch of about two miles in length, not very far from Albany, we passed through not less than eighteen locks which, like those mentioned above, were all constructed of large square stones. One can therefore assume with a fair degree of certainty that the construction of this canal has made it, to say the least, one of the most costly among all those which have been built in America; in a period of less than fourteen years since its completion, however, it has already brought its owners a sum so great that it exceeds by ten million piasters all the expenses incurred. The steadily increasing traffic on the canal has therefore induced the shareholders to let it be doubled in width in order to make it passable for steamboats, and they have already begun to carry out this plan. For this purpose several thousand men have been put to work at different places from one end of the canal to the other.

We reached Albany from Buffalo after seven days had passed, and on the following day we embarked upon the steamboat to go down the Hudson River to New York. Without

remaining in this expensive place longer than was absolutely necessary for the purchase of the provisions and other things required for the long sea voyage ahead of us and after having obtained from the Norwegian-Swedish consul the information that a Swedish brig ready for sea and bound for the Baltic lay at the pier, we went aboard it, shipped our baggage, and two days later, when the wind was favorable, put to sea. This crossing, during which we had to go through a couple of storms, nevertheless was made on the whole successfully and speedily so that at the end of five weeks we reached the Elsinore harbor. We were lucky enough on the following morning to find here by inquiry among the many ships lying at anchor one which was just ready to sail for Bergen. On this one we embarked and were so fortunate as to reach the harbor of Tananger eight days later. From there I went on to my native city, Stavanger, happy and thanking God, who had brought me so safely and well through the many and wearisome travels.

I have now described the most important of the experiences which I have had during my stay in America and on the travels connected therewith. If in telling about the latter I have been guilty of any diffuseness, I must ask the reader's kind forbearance. I can at least assure him that I have in no matter departed from the truth, just as I have in the main presented all in sequence, in order to enlighten the more uninformed of my countrymen who might wish similarly to try their luck in that part of the world, concerning the many costly as well as laborious travels; and if possible to convince them that the North American states are far from offering their new immigrants all the advantages of which so many like to dream after they have been humbugged by several encouraging and alluring, but incorrect, descriptions of the fate and present circumstances of the earlier emigrants. The country can indeed be said to be good and fertile, but while lands are obtainable nowadays only in the interior states, for example in Missouri, for a somewhat reasonable price, unfortunately it very seldom hap-

pens that a Norwegian is lucky enough to attain any prosperity; for the unaccustomed climate — in which all the less prosperous must work — puts them all, without exception, on the sickbed after a longer or a shorter time, and they are able to leave it only after a half or sometimes a whole year. What especially increases the destructive effect of the usual summer heat is the fact that the warm days are always followed by cold damp nights throughout the entire summer, and this circumstance alone ought to make it very questionable for anyone — and especially for the head of a family — to go there. At any rate one ought to consider the truly not inconsiderable fortune which is required not merely to meet the expenses of the journey but also to supply land and tools in addition to food and clothing during the fairly long period which must elapse before the ground can adequately repay the sweat of its tiller.

There may perhaps be those who believe that I, as one unaccustomed to such exertion and hardships, have described them in colors altogether too strong, but as to this I must remark on the one hand that for a period of about fifteen years in my native country I occupied a position in which constant heavy labor was required; on the other, that it is not only my own experiences which support me in this matter, but *the testimony of a great many of my countrymen in America*, which, with some few exceptions, was quite in accord with what I myself experienced. A certain Dr. Gottfried Duden in Germany, who has lived for a period of about four years in the interior of the United States, makes, in a publication which he has not long since issued, the estimate, based upon actual experiences, that barely one out of eight of the German immigrants sees his expectations in some measure fulfilled.¹²

¹² In volumes 12 and 13 of the *Missouri Historical Review*, (October, 1917–April, 1919), William K. Bek presents an English translation of "Gottfried Duden's 'Report,' 1824–1827."



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