

A story told by Lyman Wickham as he traveled from Wisconsin to Minnesota with Denison Burrows and Henry Judson.

### **Adventures of Lyman Wickham**

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"We started from Walworth County Wisconsin April 15, 1871, with Denison Burrows, his family and son in law, Henry Judson. He latter stopped at Waterloo, Iowa. We had covered wagons, and carried about 2,000 pounds. I had six children, besides myself and wife. I had \$50.00 in money when we started. We made about twenty miles a day.

All went well until we got to a place called Devils Nest, east of Dubuque. There we met a stranger on horseback, who rode besides us and asked questions. After words he stopped to talk with another man who was fishing in a rivulet that could not have any fish in it. Then he rejoined us. We felt sufficiently alarmed to stand guard all night, but were not molested.

At Dubuque we were ferried across the Mississippi. Then we had half a mile up a very steep hill covered with sandstone projecting six inches or more, making it very hard for the horses. We camped north of Dubuque that night. We took out our stove night and morning to cook with, and often laid over a full day or more to wash and bake.

In Iowa the roads were in a fearful condition. One had to keep to the middle of the road or not travel at all. Henry Judson turned out at one point, but he had hardly got rods away when the horses went up to their middles, and he had a terrible time getting back again. There was one place, three quarters of a mile long, wet and apparently impassable, where we found twenty or more teams figuring on how to get across. A man who lived near by came and offered a stack of hay to put in the road. We all went to pulling out the hay except one man, who said he had no time for hay and would show the rest of us how to get through. Denison Burrows told him he had seen as smart men made d\_ \_ \_ fools of themselves. The rest doubled up their teams and got across. I don't know but that one man is there yet, for he did not get across then, and they came away and left him there.

We struck other places of the same kind, though not so bad, and that night, when we were camped, we could look back and see the place where we camped the night before, the progress was so slow. A few days later we reached Waterloo, Iowa, where friend Burrows had friends, and stayed there three days.

At Waverly were better roads, we had to ford a river as the ice had taken the dam out, and next we forded the Shelrock River. We camped by a pit where they excavated for brick. Mr. Burrows' girl slipped into the pit, which was very deep and had water in it. Our little girl caught

hold of her and held her until her father came and got her just as she was about to drown and pull our little girl in after her.

Soon after we reached the southern border of Minnesota, and found it a splendid country, mingled prairie and timber. We headed for Albert Lea, which we found to be a nice place. As we departed from there we found an old brick church which appeared to be deserted, as sheep were on the doorstep. On our way to Winnebago City we ran across Mr. Burrows' cousin with whom I used to go to school when we were boys, so we stayed there several days. Our next crossing was the Blue Earth river, and a man named John Maguire, who showed us the way to cross, had to hold my wife in the wagon, for she was determined to get out. We had to go down a very steep bank twenty or thirty rods, then turn here and there, and finally, on account of stumps, go up the river thirty rods or more.

The next day we came to Garden City and St. Peter, and came along the Minnesota River, and a more beautiful sight I never saw. Sometimes when we camped Mr. Burrows who was a beautiful singer, would sing to us. Mrs. Burrows was a different disposition. Some times she would fret. She had a buggy. He would take her out in his arms until she laughed.

Once we crossed a sloop where we had to double teams to get across. Mr. Burrows' hind wheels sank and the feed box on behind dipped water. At last we struck Alexandria. There we ran across Sam Nichols and began nearing Otter Tail.

At one place we had to ford, and after getting this side of the river, Mr. Burrows asked how far it was to Pomme - de - Terre. The man he asked told him he had just passed through the place. We had an idea it was quite a place, as we sent our mail there from Wisconsin.

We left our wagons on section 19, Buse. I had \$19.00 left when I got there. My place was two and one half miles south of town. The lakes were full of fish and ducks, and there were lots of muskrats and minks.

As soon as I could I came to town and saw a nice town, although small. There was a pole bridge across the river just above the old mill---the Red River Roller Mill. It would hardly allow a man to walk besides his team. There was a sawmill where the cable mill now stands. On the north side of the river, near McConkey's store there was a blacksmith's shop, I think carried on by James Gray and Charles Squires. We had two stores. Anthony Cowing owned one and James Chabers owned the other. They sold dry goods and groceries, and a little of the Pattie's eye water in the back part.

Mr. Picket had a store. at this time it was not running. I happened in there one day after it got running, and saw a young man about twenty years old; I think he had on a snuff colored coat and light brown hat. He looked like a farmer. He and Mr. Picket were talking

together. Who do you suppose he was? He is now the Honorable Mr. J. W. Mason. There was only one hardware store, owned by Jacob Austin. Every thing was new and wild. There was only one Doctor, Doctor Reynolds.

When I returned to camp my wife was doing housework in a Prairie Schooner, for that was the only house we had until we built one. She stayed with my sister while I went to Alexandria to get my homestead. Mr. Cowing sent for a barrel of flour at the same time, which cost \$4.00 per 100 pounds. We were five weeks and four days on our way here. We began to raise our house on the fourth of July. When we got ready to shingle it we took rafters or poles, then course sloo hay to cover them with then we took the tough sod and put on over the hay, two tiers of sod. We cut out one doorway and one window hole, and had no floor nor door nor window except blankets hanging up. We lived that way all summer. We had no bedstead, but I guess you would have thought there was fleas enough. They were awful. Next fall we finished our house. There was plenty of game and trapping was profitable. Also there were many Indians, sometimes they were hostile and tried to scare us, but did no harm.

The next thing of importance was my trip to Benson after freight for Gray and Squires. A brother of George Moles was here then - - the one who built the store that James McCrossin now uses as a livery barn. I took him and Mr. Miles' father in law to Benson for \$5.00. There we saw a man who had his head split open with an ax. The Abercrombie surgeon sewed it up, and that was the last I ever heard of him. I started across country with a bellows and a hogs head full of coal. I had to be ferried across the river. There was not a house for miles. Finally I struck a store and soon after the Pomme de Terre River, which had lots of big stones in it. We soon got back again with the first big bellows in Fergus Falls.

I was gone five days and got \$35.00 for it. By this time things began to boom. The first grist I had ground I sent to Balmoral Mills. The sawmill began running. They put stone in the sawmill but it would not work. The gear did not last long. The next spring we got fish in abundance. They came to the mouth of the ravine and came up to where the water was not more than two inches deep, so the fishes' backs were out of the water. You could stand there with a fork and through out bushels of them. I have seen wagonloads of them caught.

There was then one printing office, run by O. S. King. It was the Fergus Falls Advocate. I took it one year. Sometimes I would get a whole sheet, sometimes a half sheet. Mr. George B. Wright was the father of the town, and a good one he was. He liked to see things prosper.

The first minister was the Reverend D. Goodale. He was the founder of the Presbyterian Church. He has preached in our log house. He did not have plush chairs nor a carpet to kneel on, nor did he send the hat around. He seemed to work for the soul and not the money. I

tell you, there was then as fine a class of people here as I ever met- - so kind and neighborly. We were all equal at this time.

I went on freighting and had to lie out on the ground nights, with nothing but a quilt over me. I worked hard and with over exposure, I was taken sick with inflammation of the lungs, liver and bowels all at once, or in these days it might have been appendicitis, which we did not have in those days. I became very weak, so I could not raise my head and they had to feed me with a spoon. While I was in this condition two big Indians with a big dog came in one day and wanted bread. My wife gave them bread and butter and they turned and feed it to their dog. My wife was there alone with two little children, and I was helpless. Then they took a knife out of its sheath and strapped it. There was a band of them in our grove west of the house, they whooped and shouted all night. The next night they killed one of the band in Mr. Gowdys grove and took his body to Otter Tail to bury. Do not imagine we had a snap.

At the same time we had some good times. Our neighbors would come over in the evenings and we would sing and tell stories, and have all kinds of amusements, but did not play cards. Then we were all equal. We would have supper and afterwards disperse and go home; but now one has to have ten cents and if he is unfortunate and does not have it he is left out.

I think George Nichols was postmaster then, and I believe it was the next year that Mr. Underwood started his paper. When we came here there were no settlers in western Minnesota. Mr. Burrows, Mr. Robbins and Mr. Hodges were the first ones. They took Albert Wright with them as pilot and found good tracts of land to settle on.

I have hauled freight from nearly all stations from Benson to Campbell, and have seen the water almost up to the bed of the wagon. One time I was after freight and camped for the night, and an Indian drove up with a steer and a half-breed cart. He made the steer fast tied his fore legs and turned him out. Those carts were all made of wood and they never grease them. After he took supper he went to bed, getting close to me as our bed was our mother earth. He rolled himself in his blanket and I followed suit. I have seen lots of them coming from Benson, going to Abercrombie and Manitoba and Grand Forks. On a frosty morning you could hear for miles the screech of the wheels. Benson was the end of the railroad at that time.

Possibly you want to know what countrymen I am. My grandfather was born in England. My father was born in the United States. I was born in Washington County, New York. I came west in my 33rd year and I am now in my 74th year."  
Lyman Wickham "1897"