

Exploration of This Territory by First Farmers of Winona County In Quest of Land Related by E. B. Drew in Memoirs

County's First Farmer Tells of Trip to the Rollingstone Community, and of Staking Claims at Minnesota City.

HAD TO FORD BIG STREAM OF WATER

Exploration of the very early settlers of the Rollingstone community, detailing their trip from Wabasha Prairie (now Winona) along the bluffs to Minnesota City, is narrated in the second installment of the memoirs of E. B. Drew, Winona county's first farmer.

According to Mr. Drew's diary, it was necessary to ford a stream in the west end of the city to cross over to the bluffs, the location of this stream probably being what is now the marsh in the west end of the city. At that time, 75 years ago, Winona appeared to be an island with a large stream of water running from the Mississippi river into Lake Winona.

The first farmers in this vicinity settled near Minnesota City, which at the time of exploration was close to the river because of the very high condition of the water. Mr. Drew ventures the opinion that had not the early explorers mistaken straight slough for the main channel of the Mississippi river, Winona would have had to share its prosperity with Minnesota City as it was six miles closer to the inland farming community.

The second installment of Mr. Drew's diary follows:

"Johnson, the first settler was full of bad stories about the Rollingstone—that was no place for a town—many were leaving and many had left. He was very anxious to have us all stop at Wabasha Prairie, and offered each one an acre of ground on the town plat, who would improve it within a reasonable time by putting up a building. He claimed to own the townsite in partnership with Captain Smith.

"Denman and Secretary E. B. Thomas concluded they would ride on horseback up to the Rollingstone and see for themselves. They would come right back. A free title to the whole prairie at that time would have been no inducement for me to live there. I decided to leave as Denman and Thomas returned. They did not have occasion to stay very long for I think their minds were made up before they started that morning, that they were not going there to settle.

"Haddock, the president of the association, came back with them feeling pretty bad because their secretary had gone back on them, but he was not disheartened by any means. Haddock had been the principal promoter and head man in getting up this association. He was industrious and

stayed and worked. He had a great deal to do measuring, staking and marking. For some reason Murphy never returned to the colony.

Looking for Good Site.

"When we first met Haddock at the time he came back with Denman and Thomas we had quite a talk with him. We told him our business was farming that we did not know anything else, and did not expect to try anything else. We were looking for a good site. He said there was good rich soil there and was very enthusiastic over their location. He was much pleased when Rollin Coryell and I said we would go back with him and see for ourselves. We left Will Coryell at the steamboat landing to get the outfit as far out on the prairie as possible, while we started on foot, reaching the slough some two miles out, where a lot of water was running, it appearing to be part of the river at that time. During the high water the upper prairie was an island. Johnson was very accommodating, going with us to show us the best place to cross the slough. Haddock had persuaded Elder Ely to go with us but he soon turned back. It was too much for the Elder. I will here state that of all those who took an acre of ground from the Johnson and Smith townsite, Ely was the only one who stayed it out until he got title to his acre. Denman held on for four or five months, then came up and took a claim of 160 acres next to and part of the ground of the association on the lower end of Rollingstone creek. His mother took 160 acres on the prairie.

"At the crossing of the slough mentioned there was a little dugout canoe. It would carry only two with

freight and taking back were dissatisfied and I came back with us on to where Will was with earthly possessions. It when we got there. We and went to bed.

Raise Wagon

"The next morning I wagon box up by putting false bottom to keep up out of the water. V slough where we did th it seemed to be my I have to strip and drive They all got in the I walked beside the lead cow huck close to the We could not loose he go wherever the oxe seemed as if there was and more current than ous day. Where it wa cattle had to hold up and I found it pretty ha myself by taking hold the ox-bow. The river ing rapidly.

"It was not many days fore I came to a stand some time before it wer I think there never bel a wagon through betw Prairie and the Rolling

"We found a pretty along under the bluffs places that we had to h from turning over. We around among the tree to get through but final on the south side of creek where Ellsworth's Several persons appear posite side of the stre prised to see a covere ox teams as they were I ter the settlement. No of the shanty and the appeared and told us I only place we could c place having a rock bo no difficulty as the mo wagon.

stone bottoms. When we got to Rollingstone creek Haddock got down and took a drink, saying "Oh, the Blessed Rollingstone." He bragged about how pure the water was. When opposite to where the North-Western and St. Paul railroad depot is now at Minnesota City, we found some men peeling bark to cover a pole shanty. There we again met Mr. Lord. He had just returned from a trip to the back country. He was well pleased with what he saw and said right away that he was satisfied and going to stay. Mr. Lord, a Mr. Williams and Elder Sweet had taken provisions to last three or four days, and had gone back 20 to 30 miles.

Each Made a Claim.

"They found a fine prairie country with burroak groves. Not far from the Whitewater each made a claim. Williams said that would do, it was as fine a country as he ever saw. They never proved up these claims. Lord went with us to take a little look at the colony at Minnesota City. We went to where they had just got up a big tent, either that day or the day before. The women and children were in it and seemed comfortable. If they had that tent a week or two sooner many of those who had left for the need of shelter would have stayed.

"In this tent, I first saw Mrs. Delworth, Mrs. Cotton and Mrs. Bannon. They had arrived the day before, the fourth of May and always afterward celebrated that day with other old settlers, while they lived. The association had bought a small flat boat over at Holmes Landing, now Fountain City. Maybe it would carry a ton or more. A couple were running

full of vim and energy, and with some others in this movement had experience in locating, laying out and building a town not far from New York City. He had made some money and thus got the idea of locating in the west. Haddock, and Murphy of the locating committee, started about the first of February. His first letter was from Beloit, Wis. He spoke very highly of the class of people he found there and said the place had been settled by a colony similar to what they proposed at the Rollingsstone.

Up River on Skates.

"They looked through Wisconsin and traveled over a good deal of sparsely and unsettled country, but could not find anything to suit them. About the last of February they came to the Mississippi river at La Crosse. They came up the river on skates. Haddock in his second letter to the western farm and village advocate sent to members describes their journey up the river.

"He states that about noon after leaving La Crosse, they came to a log cabin on the river bank, occupied by a young man named Brown, an Indian trader, who kindly prepared a hot dinner for them. It was Nathan Brown, the pioneer. I afterward saw a notice in a Winona paper of this "young man" as Haddock called him, celebrating his 80th birthday. Where this log cabin stood he laid out the village of Dakota many years ago.

"According to Haddock's description of the place, they must have camped that night among the small trees and brush at the lower end of Wabasha Prairie. They saw Johnson on Captain Smith's claim. When he learned their business and what they proposed to do, he offered half the claim if he would bring the colony there to locate. They could not see anything there to suit them, and went on, mistaking straight slough for the main channel of the Mississippi river.

Only One Claim Taken.

"The valley at the mouth of the Rollingsstone looked like the place they were searching for. The more they examined it the more they liked it. Of the thousands of acres only one claim had been taken. Isaac M. Noricong, a millwright, had claimed the millsite where Ellsworth's mill was afterward built. He had a shanty 6 by 12 of lumber brought up on the ice from La Crosse. They laid their plans before him. He concluded to let them have his claim, reserving a few acres where he proposed to build a mill and become a member of the association.

"If Haddock and Murphy had not been mistaken that straight slough was the main channel of the river, I think Winona would have had to share her prosperity with Minnesota City for the latter is six miles nearer the back farming country. As soon as Haddock and Murphy could take measurements, Murphy alone left for New York to have the ground platted into city lots. He started out through an uninhabited country, camping out in the dead of winter. He finally reached New York where he had the town plat lithographed showing all the ground, the creek and the lots numbered, containing two acres apiece, including the streets. A copy was sent to each member. Haddock

safety. Haddock and Rollin got into it regularly; two or three times a day, from a little way below where Troost mill was built to the upper end of the lower prairie near where the old fair grounds was afterward. "The water was then so high that they could run it anywhere over the bottoms. They were bringing up