

TWO MISSIONARIES IN THE SIOUX COUNTRY

THE NARRATIVE of Samuel W. Pond, now published for the first time, was written in two small notebooks.¹ These were presented to the Minnesota Historical Society in January, 1919, by Mrs. Frances Pond Titus, then residing at Boise, Idaho, a granddaughter of Samuel. It is difficult to determine the precise date when Pond wrote the narrative, but internal evidence indicates that it was completed about 1880.

The narrative is an unpretentious, straightforward account of the experiences and observations of a frontier missionary, broad in scope because Pond was deeply interested not only in the spiritual problems that he confronted, but also in the language and lore of the natives and in the conditions and circumstances of the frontier. His own career and that of his brother Gideon, furthermore, were so intertwined that the narrative necessarily embraces the experiences of both. The account presents a survey of a career that was launched in the West as early as 1834. That there should be some lapses of memory is not remarkable when one recalls that this survey was written nearly a half century after many of the events recorded took place. Samuel drops out of reckoning the year 1841, and some little confusion results from this omission. Occasionally, also, there are minor errors of detail. In general, however, the narrative is remarkably free from the mistakes of memory that so often mar the pages of reminiscent writings.

¹ A biographical sketch of "The Pond Brothers" by the editor of the present document appears in *Minnesota History*, 15:273-281 (September, 1934). It was prepared originally as an address and presented as part of a Pond centennial program at Lake Harriet in Minneapolis on July 14, 1934. In preparing the present document for publication, the editor received valuable assistance from Miss Sarah A. Davidson of St. Paul.

Since the narrative itself is paralleled by a vast body of contemporary Pond letters and other missionary records in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, it has been a relatively simple matter to correct Samuel's errors. This task has been further simplified by the fact that over the ink handwriting of the author appear occasional penciled corrections in another handwriting. Who made these corrections has not been determined, but it may be noted that they correspond to the dates and facts as presented in the volume by Samuel Pond, Jr., entitled *Two Volunteer Missionaries among the Dakotas*. It quotes liberally, but not always accurately, from the narrative.

That the present narrative makes many contributions of specific fact to the early history of Minnesota and the Northwest can hardly be claimed. It is nevertheless a major document for that history, interesting and important because of the portraits that it draws, in realistic colors, of two major figures of the northwestern frontier. The ups and downs of their careers are faithfully chronicled, the triumphs and disappointments that accompanied their efforts are set forth in simple language, and considerable light is thrown upon the general setting in which those efforts were made—the early Indian frontier. For many, however, the narrative will seem of permanent value chiefly for its convincing self-characterization of the author and its portraiture of his devoted brother—missionaries, recorders of the Dakota language and lore, human and living figures of the past.

It must not be forgotten that the narrative is a part of a large and impressive body of Pond records, consisting of letters, most of which are now in the Minnesota Historical Society's collection of Pond Papers, which the two missionaries wrote to friends and relatives; a vast correspondence to and from officers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, among the board's archives in Boston; the joint biography of the brothers by Samuel

Pond, Jr.; and finally the many printed writings left by Samuel and Gideon Pond themselves. In the framework of all this production, the Pond narrative has a place of interest and importance that well merits the permanent form herewith given to it.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
MINNEAPOLIS

THE NARRATIVE OF SAMUEL W. POND

IN THE FALL OF 1831, My brother G. H. Pond and I, with about one hundred others, united with the Congregational Church in Washington Conecticut, our native place, he being then twenty one and I twenty three years of age. Soon after I joined the church I lost all hope that I was, or ever could be a christian, and for many months my mental sufferings were intense.

When I was brought out of that gloomy darkness into the light of the Sun of righteousness, I felt constrained by the love of Christ to go where ever my services in the cause of religion seemed most needed. My brother and I both thought we could be more useful some where else than in New England, where christianity had so many friends and advocates, and we looked westward for a field of labor. So it was arranged between us that I should go west in the Spring of 1833, and, if I found a place where we could be useful, he was to join me the next year, he in the mean time worked on a farm in the summer, and attended an academy in the winter. Some of his friends offered to aid him in obtaining a liberal education but he did not like to be dependant on others for pecuniary aid.

I left home the 25th of March and, passing through New York and Philadelphia, took deck passage on a Steam boat, at Pittsburg, for St. Louis. In New Jersey I first saw a railroad, but their locomotives were horses.

I knew something of the ignorance and barbarism then prevailing in Missourie and intended to go there, but the cholera prevailed that season on the western rivers, and my health suffered so much on the Ohio, that I was very feeble when I reached St Louis, and learning the condition of things at Galena from one who had been there, I concluded to go there, and arrived at that place about one month after

leaving home, but so weak as to be but just able to walk. As soon as I was able to work, I was engaged by the publisher² of a newspaper to work in his garden, and his house was my home as long as I remained in Galena, but he died that summer of the cholera. I had been engaged in teaching school several winters before I left home but I could find no school to teach though I went to Mineral Point—Gratiots Grove, and other places in search of one. About the first of June I started on horse back with the Rev. Atratus Kent on a trip to Chicago.³ We first went south to the Illinois, and followed that river up, and so passed on to Chicago. When I read lately of the death of the pioneer [John] Dixon it remind[ed] me of the fact that we were hospitably entertain[ed] by him forty seven years ago.⁴ On our return we spent one night with Mr. Goodrich late of Bloomington, but I little thought then that I should ever see him here, or that his son would marry my niece.⁵ On our return from Chicago we passed, most of the way, through an uninhabited country, and for seventy mile[s] I think we saw no house except a deserted Indian village. Indeed there was little of Chicago then but the name, but I saw there many of the Winnebagos, and that first turned my attention to the Indians, though I did not feel inclined to go among the Winnebagos.

In Galena I often passed by a store where a young man sold liquor, and one day I stepped in to try to persuade him to engage in a better business. That interview led to an acquaintance with him and I

² The word "editor" appears in the manuscript above the word "publisher."

³ See *post*, p. 20, and author's note. Several of Kent's letters are among the Pond Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. His first name appears as "Aratus" in Samuel W. Pond, Jr., *Two Volunteer Missionaries among the Dakotas*, 16 (Boston and Chicago, 1893). For further information on Kent's career, see Charles J. Kennedy, "The Presbyterian Church on the Wisconsin Frontier," in the Department of History of the Presbyterian Church, *Journal*, 18:141-155 (December, 1938).

⁴ Dixon was the founder of Dixon, Illinois, a village situated on the wagon road connecting Galena and the Illinois River. He kept a ferry across the Rock River and made a livelihood "entertaining travelers and keeping stage teams." He died about 1876. "Reminiscences of Wisconsin in 1833," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 10:231; Reuben G. Thwaites, "The Story of the Black Hawk War," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 12:228.

⁵ Allen L. Goodrich married Ruth Hine Pond, the eldest of Gideon's children, on April 13, 1858. Daniel S. Pond, *A Genealogical Record of Samuel Pond, and His Descendants*, 81 (Rochester, 1875).

learned that he was from the Red Riv[e]r country, and had passed through the land of the Dakotas, on his way down. His description of the Dakotas was pretty accurate, but applied only to the buffalo hunters of the plains so that when we left Galena we supposed we were going among a roving people where we could have no home, and must hunt wild game for a living, and we made our preparations accordingly, encumbering ourselves with rifles, ammunition &c. that we never needed.⁶ I made no effort to obtain any further information concerning the Dakotas but wrote to my brother proposing that we should go among them the next Spring, to which he assented. When I told Mr. Kent of our intentions he objected to our plan in such emphatic language that I did not mention it to him again until the next Spring, when we were ready to start but, I purchased rifles, blankets and other things that I supposed we should need so as to have all ready when my brother should arrive, for in those days if we were not ready for the first boat we might have to wait long for another.

I had a hundred dollars when I came to Galena, and earned some money while I was there, but I had an attack of the cholera in the summer followed by the ague, and when our outfit was purchased my money was gone, and more than gone, so that I exchanged my watch for a pair of blankets, but they were good ones and contributed more to our comfort than the watch would have done. I had thirty dollars which the members of the Sabbath school in my native place had sent me before they knew that I was coming among the Indians, but as they might not approve of our undertaking I did not like to use it, and left it with Mr. Kent, advising him to purchase Sabbath School libraries with it. He afterwards sent a library to Ft. Snelling purchased with part of that money. If he had known that was all I had he would have been more likely to offer me thirty dollars than to take it, but that he never knew, nor did those who gave it to me ever know it.

Gideon had \$300. when he reached Galena, and with that we started the first day of May 1834. After we had carried our bag-

⁶The Ponds expected that in the Minnesota country they would dress most of the year in skins. "I think if I had some linen pantaloons I should have them on today," wrote Gideon to Edward J. Pond on May 19, 1834. This letter is in the Pond Papers. Some of the early letters of Samuel and Gideon are printed in *Two Volunteer Missionaries*.

gage to the boat, I went to bid Mr. Kent adieu and hand him the money I have mentioned. He seemed astonished and said "I thought you had given up that foolish idea. You are just throwing yourselves away" He came to the boat just before it left bringing a letter of introduction to Major [John H.] Bliss,⁷ which he had written, but not at my request.*

My friend wished to have me take a letter of recommendation from the church but when I left Washington I declined it. One good old man who had been a devoted christian many years and was a deacon in the church said to me "I should feel mean my self to go away without a letter from the church.["]

My brother told me that none of our friends approved of our undertaking, and some of them were strongly opposed to it. When our boat pushed out of Fever River⁸ into the Mississippi and turned its head up stream, my brother remarked "We are engaging in a serious enterprize." I thought so too but I did not believe it was a doubtful one, and felt a cheerful confidence that we were in the right way, and if he had any misgivings he kept them to himself. At Prairie du Chien the boat was delayed a while, and I called on the Rev. Mr. [David] Lowrie Missionary to the Winnebagos, thinking I might obtain some information from him that would be of advantage to us, but he did not hesitate to tell me that we were engaged in a very foolish and hopeless undertaking.⁹ He said we should have to hire interpreters to begin with and, could do nothing without spending a great deal of money. I said little to him in reply, and indeed we were not in the habit of arguing the case with those who were trying to discourage us, but merely said that we had the Gospel and the Dakotas were perishing for want of it, and that where other men could support their families we ought to be able to support ourselves It did not discourage me at all when Mr. Lowrie told me how much

⁷ Bliss was the commandant at Fort Snelling from 1833 to 1836. See the "Reminiscences of Fort Snelling" by his son, John H. Bliss, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:335-353.

* Mr. Kent was to me a true and life long friend [*author's note.*]

⁸ Now the Galena River.

⁹ Lowry had gone to Prairie du Chien from Nashville, Tennessee, to serve as superintendent of the school for the Winnebago projected under the Winnebago treaty of 1832. He went with the Winnebago to Minnesota as agent in 1848. For some references to Lowry, see Kennedy, in Department of History of the Presbyterian Church, *Journal*, 18:190, 210 (March, 1939).

help he had had and how little progress he had made in learning the language of the Winnebagos.

We found a few Dakotas at Prairie du Chien and I asked a white man who seemed to know something of their language, how to ask the name of a thing in Dakota. He told me and I wrote it down, and then, approaching a Dakota who was standing by a pile of iron, I asked its name. He promptly replied *maza* and then dipped a little water in his hand from the river and said *mini*—then took up a handful of sand and said *wiyaka*. I have always had a relish for studying languages. In times of leisure it has been my recreation, and I have often rejoiced at the discove[r]y of some important grammatical rule or the signification of some obscure word or sentence, but no other acquisition of that kind ever afforded me so much pleasure as it did then to be able to say in Dakota What do you call this? We had a key now to the Dakota names of visible objects, and it did not rust in our hands for want of use. We began the study of the language there on the banks of the Mississippi without an interpreter and there we made the first collection of words for the future dictionary. We reached the landing at Ft. Snelling the sixth of May, and under other circumstances we should have gazed with interest on the features of the landscape around us, but to us the chief object of interest was the Indians who were congregated on the bank of the river.

The Rev. W[illiam] T. Boutwell came to the boat before we left it and our meeting with him we always remembered with pleasure for from him we heard the first word of encouragement.¹⁰ He was stationed among the * Pillagers of Leech Lake and made a heroic effort to hold that dangerous outpost, but was finally compelled to abandon it. He labored as a Missionary long and faithfully but some get more credit than they deserve and some less.

¹⁰ Boutwell, in his diary entry for May 6, records boarding the "Warrior" and meeting the Pond brothers. Their "demeanor" attracted his attention, and he learned that they "had been brought into the field from a sense of duty, without the knowledge or direction of the American Board or any other benevolent institutions." A copy of Boutwell's diary for the period 1832-37 is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. A contemporary letter by Samuel Pond, in the Pond Papers, also records the meeting. "He appears rejoiced to see us," wrote Samuel.

* This name was given them by traders and I suppose was well earned [author's note.]

Though our future was still all uncertain we were pleased to learn on our arrival at the Fort that we should not be comp[e]lled to roam over the country with savages, depending on the chase for a subsistence. Maj [Lawrence] Taliaferro was then in Pennsylvania but a sub agent, named [Horatio] Grooms, permitted us to occupy a vacant room in one of the agency houses, but not rent free, and from him we received no encouragement.¹¹ We had not been there long before Maj Bliss sent his orderly requiring us to appear before him and give an account of ourselves. I of course obeyed the mandate, and he told me it was his duty to exclude from the Indian Country all who were not authorized to be here. Having no authority to show I handed him Mr. Kents letter which he pronounced unsatisfactory, for he said though Mr. Kent was a reliable man, his acquaintance with me was too short for him to know much about me. I then handed him a private letter from a General Brinsmade, a man then extensively known in New England, and also a letter from the post master of my native place which had contained the money, that was sent me by the Sabbath School. These letters he said were perfectly satisfactory so far as our character was concerned. He then asked me what our plans were, but I told him we had no plan except to do what seemed most for the benefit of the Indian. He told me then that the Kaposia band¹² wanted plowing done and had a plow and oxen, but could not use them, so I volunteered to go down and help them, and then hastened back to the agency house to tell Gideon how I had succeeded with the Major, for I knew that his mind would be in a state of anxious suspense. These little things may seem now hardly worth relating, but whether we were to stay here or be driven away depended on the result of that interview with the Major. We were in fact

¹¹ Taliaferro was Indian agent at Fort Snelling from 1819 to the fall of 1839. Because of ill health, he was on leave of absence when the Ponds arrived. The Minnesota Historical Society has his manuscript journal and his papers, and his "Auto-biography" appears in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:189-255. See also Willoughby M. Babcock, "Major Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian Agent," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11:358-375 (December, 1924). Grooms was appointed subagent at Fort Snelling in January, 1833, and he served until the summer of 1834. A number of letters to and from Grooms, written during this period, are in the archives of the Indian Office in Washington, D. C., and among the Taliaferro Papers.

¹² A band of Sioux living in a village about fifteen miles below the mouth of the Minnesota, near the present site of South St. Paul. "Kaposia" means "lithe people."

intruders, and had no right to be here. The missionaries of the [American] Board [of Commissioners for Foreign Missions] did not come here without authority from the Secretary of war. Major [Joseph] Plympton, who succeeded Maj. Bliss in command, received orders to remove all persons from this region who were not authorized to be here, but we were not molested.¹³ From the time of my first interview with M[a]jor Bliss both he and Mrs Bliss were our true friends, and when I returned from Kaposia they invited me to reside in their family, and instruct their son, a boy eight or ten years old, but I had other work to do.

When the Indian[s] learned that I would plow for them they took down the plow in a canoe and I drove down the oxen. At Kaposia the chief was Big Thunder the father of Taoyatedute called by the whites but erroneously Little Crow, and the chief soldier was Big Iron.¹⁴ These two held the plow alternately while I drove the oxen. I suppose they were the first Dakotas who ever held a plow. The dogs or Indians stole my provisions the first night I was there, and I did not fare sumptuously every day, for food was scarce and not very palatable. About the time I returned from Kaposia Major Taliaferro arrived, and seemed glad to find us here. No more was said about rent and we kept the key to our room till our house was finished at Lake Calhoun.¹⁵ This was a great convenience for us,

¹³ Plympton was commandant at Fort Snelling from 1837 to 1841. Warren Upham and Mrs. Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912*, 606 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14).

¹⁴ Big Thunder was succeeded by his son as chief in 1845. The Indian name which Pond states is erroneously rendered "Little Crow" really means, according to Frederick W. Hodge, "the sacred pigeon-hawk which comes walking." See his *Handbook of American Indians*, 1:769 (Washington, 1910). Big Iron was visited by the Reverend Alfred Brunson in the spring of 1837 and is described by him in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 11:190 (July 21, 1837). On the famous plowing episode see also Samuel Pond, "The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:324; Samuel to Herman Hine, May 25, 1834, in the Pond Papers; and Samuel to Dr. Asa W. Daniels, in the latter's "Reminiscences of Little Crow," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:515.

¹⁵ Compare the Taliaferro Journal, July 7, 1834. Taliaferro pays tribute to the "Philanthropic and Christian devotion" of the Ponds, and adds, "Laugh who will at these men I have only to thank my God for permitting me to receive them." In the same entry he writes, "They will plough some this fall and again in the spring for the Indians, & go on thereafter to instruct them in the arts & habits of civilized life."

for before that time neither provisions nor clothing were safe at the lake. We told the Agent that we wished to build a house near some village, and he advised us to build at Lake Calhoun, and after my brother had plowed for the Indians a few days we commenced building where *The Pavilion* now stands.¹⁶ Owing to our inexperience we wasted a great deal of labor. We put up a building of large oak logs that might have stood fifty years, but we could have built a more comfortable house afterwards with half the labor. Five years afterwards we used the timber to build a breastwork for the Indians. While building we occupied a temporary shelter in the woods where we were constantly surrounded by a cloud of mosquitoes, and as my brother's health was not good that summer, the laborious days and restless nights almost wore him out, but when our house was finished it seemed like a palace to us after living a few weeks in that kennel, and we were no longer compelled to walk eight miles and back every week to Agency house to get a supply of food, for we now had a safe place to store our clothing and provisions. Maj T. gave us a window and lock, also an axe, and Mrs Bliss sent us a ham and Major Bliss gave us potatoes to plant the next spring.¹⁷ That was all the pecuniary aid we received or wished to receive, and when the Agent offered us a stove we preferred to build a fire place, for while we felt grateful for the favors we received, we wished to maintain a spirit of independence. We had the use of oxen but we used them chiefly for the Indian[s], and had to take care of them through the winter. But though we did not receive, and should not have accepted much pecuniary aid, if it had been offered us, the influence of friends in our favor was a great advantage to us, for it was needed to counteract the efforts of others to excite the prejudices of the Indians against us, and we congratulated ourselves on the timely arrival of Mr. [Henry H.] Sibley at Mendota for if [Alexis] Bailly had continued in charge of that important station and centre of influence we should have had no friends on that side of the river.¹⁸

¹⁶ See a sketch in Samuel Pond to Hine, January 19, 1835, Pond Papers. A bronze tablet, which reproduces in relief Samuel's map of the vicinity, was placed in 1930 on the site of the Calhoun Sioux village in Minneapolis.

¹⁷ Taliaferro mentions supplying the Ponds with a yoke of oxen, tools, and a sash and door. See his Journal, July 17, 1834. Bliss, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:347, states that his father gave the lumber.

¹⁸ Sibley arrived at Mendota on October 28, 1834, to serve as agent of the American Fur Company. In that capacity he replaced Bailly, who

From the time of our arrival we considered the acquisition of the Dakota language of paramount importance, and, however our hands might be employed, this work was not neglected. We were ever on the alert to catch some new word or phrase from the mouths of the Indians, and though our memories were retentive we "*made assurance doubly sure,*" by writing down what we learned, but here we met with a serious difficulty for want of a suitable alphabet. With the vowels we had no difficulty, for there are in Dakota but five vowel sounds, and they are common to the English, but with the consonants it is different, for there are sounds in the language which no English letter or combination of letters can be made to express. To meet this difficulty we took such letters from the English alphabet as are not needed in Dakota, and gave them new names and new powers, and we also made the single character *c* and *x* represent the English sounds of *Ch* and *sh*. When our alphabet was completed each letter had one uniform sound and no two letters could be used to denote the same sound so there was but one way of spelling any given word and if one knew how to pronounce a word he knew what letters to use in spelling it and no time is consumed in learning the orthography of the language except the little that is required in learning the alphabet and this accounts for the facility with which the Dakotas learn to read, and write, I do not think there was in this work any marvelous display of ingenuity but it was a work of more difficulty than that of preparing an alphabet for the Sandwich Islands, which had but five vowels and seven consonants all the same as in English, and nothing was to be done but to drop the letters that were not needed.¹⁹

We contrived this alphabet the first summer we were here, and our house was completed and the language reduced to writing about the same time, but the house was to stand but five years while the alphabet will be used so long as the Dakota language is written.

When the Missionaries came the next Spring we submitted the alphabet to their inspection. Dr [Thomas S.] Williamson said they had been accused of selling liquor to the natives. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:162, 165 (St. Paul, 1921).

¹⁹ The paramount importance of learning the Indian language stands out in the early Pond letters. See especially Samuel to Dr. Fowler, May, 1834, and Gideon to Edward J. Pond, May 19, 1834, Pond Papers. In the first flush of optimism Samuel wrote that Dakota was an easy language to learn, but he soon changed his opinion. Samuel to Hine, May 25, 1834, Pond Papers.

would use it for the present till they could have time to discover what alterations were required, for it was not to be supposed that untutored laymen could perform a literary work so well that a college graduate could not mend it, but the alphabet continued to be used without material alteration until the publication of the dictionary, and I think the changes then introduced would not have been made if all the members of the mission had been consulted.²⁰ The Episcopalians have lately published books without those *improvements* because it was more convenient.

We had not been in our new house long before a young man came and inquired of us privately whether Dakotas could learn to read, and when we told him they could, he expressed a desire to learn. We taught him the letters, and showed him how to use them in the formation of words, and, as he was of quick apprehension, he learned in a few weeks to write letters that we could understand, and was, doubtless, the first Dakota who learned to read and write.²¹ Thus our first experiment with the alphabet proved quite satisfactory.

Lieut. E[dmund] A. Ogden came to Ft Snelling about the same time that we did, but he was then a wild young man, and we knew little about him until the next winter when he became a decided christian, and from that time was one of the excellent of the earth — one in whom were united the finest sensibility with a sound judgment and strict integrity.²² Soon after he came here, he with other young officers, to pass away their time, employed Scott Campbell to go

²⁰ For an account of Dr. Williamson, the well-known medical missionary, see Charles M. Gates, "The Lac qui Parle Mission," in *Minnesota History*, 16:133-151 (June, 1935). Williamson, Samuel Pond, and Jedediah D. Stevens "conferred together & fixed upon an alphabet and a general system of orthography before the Dr. went up the [Minnesota] river" to Lac qui Parle. See Stevens to David Greene, January 27, 1836. This letter is among the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, in the Andover Harvard Theological Library at Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Minnesota Historical Society has transcripts of all letters from these archives cited herein. A *Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota Language*, "collected by members of the Dakota mission" and edited by Stephen R. Riggs, was published by the Smithsonian Institution under the patronage of the Minnesota Historical Society in 1852.

²¹ The Indian student was Mazardhamani, "Walking-bell-ringer." See Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries*, 52, 115.

²² A sketch of Ogden appears in "Early Days at Fort Snelling," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1:358 n. (1902).

through the English dictionary with them, they writing down the definitions in Dakota as he dictated, and Ogden afterwards gave his manuscript to me.²³ Campbell, who knew that they would never detect the errors, had taken no great pains to give them correct definitions, and as Ogden knew nothing of the language, and used the English alphabet many of his words were not easily decyphered, but, with the aid of Indians, we succeeded in getting from the manuscript a considerable number of words that were new to us, though we could not depend upon Campbells definitions. We learned the grammatical structure of the language as children learn their mother tongue, for interpreters could not help us. Madam La Chapelle of Prairie du Chien gave Mr Gavin his first lessons in Dakota,²⁴ but when he asked her some question about the verb she replied, "If you can find a verb in Dakota you are a smart man," and when I asked Scott Campbell how the Dakotas formed the future tense he said "The Dakotas have no future tense." But we learned the future tense and many other rules of grammar, without his help. Every step in advance made the next step easier so that when we had been here a year we had quite a large collection of words, and had no difficulty in conversi[n]g with Indians so as to make ourselves understood. It is true we had only made a begin[n]ing, but a beginning is something for *C'est le premier pas qui cout*, and they who came after us never knew what it did cost, for it is one thing to learn a word or a rule in print or in writing, and quite another thing to catch it from the mouth of an Indian. We found that we could learn more of the French grammar in a week than we could of the Dakota in six months.

In the Spring of 1835, Dr Williamson and Mr. [Jedediah D.] Stevens came and after plowing for the Indians my brother aided Mr. S. in building at Lake Harriet, while I remained at Lake Cal-

²³ For further information about Campbell, a noted Scotch-Sioux Indian interpreter and hunter, see Pond, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:339-341, and M. M. Hoffmann, "New Light on Old St. Peter's and Early St. Paul," in *Minnesota History*, 8:40-42 (March, 1927).

²⁴ Mrs. Antoine La Chapelle's father was Pierre La Pointe, a noted interpreter, and her mother was a sister of the famous Sioux chief Wabasha. See B. W. Brisbois, "Recollections of Prairie du Chien," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 9:285. David Gavin, a Swiss missionary, was sent out, with Samuel Dentan, by the Committee of Missions at Lausanne, Switzerland. For accounts of their activities, see Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:200, 203, and A. Grandjean, *La mission romande* (Lausanne, 1917).

houn and planted.²⁵ Gideon was always too generous to get along easily in such a selfish world as this, and he worked hard too hard that summer, and his employment kept him much of the time away from the Indians, while I was continually with them, but what I learned I tried to communicate to him.

In the fall of the year I sold part of the corn I had raised to Mr Sibley, and though G. had worked all summer for Mr. S. gratuitously, we had more money then than when we landed at Ft. Snelling, and if I had sold all that I raised it would have amounted to consid[e]rable more than the salary that I recieved from the board for several years after I was married.

We purchased a cow and were about to make some improvements in our house when Mr. S. said if we remained at Lake Calhoun he could do nothing at Lake Harriet and that might have been true, for he was never popular with the Indians. He also claimed that as we had approved of his building at Lake Harri[e]t we were in some measure responsible for the success of his mission. We learned afterwards that he wrote to Secretary [David] Green[e] that the reason why we joined him was because we were so uncomfortably situated at Lake Calhoun, but we did not know it then or we should have staid there, so we reluctantly abandoned our house — turned over our cow, corn and potatoes, of which we had a large crop, to Mr. S. and G. remained with him, while I went off with the Indians on a hunting expedition.²⁶ The language however was the game I went to hunt, and I was as eager in pursuit of that as the Indians were of deer. There were fifty men besides myself in the party that I accompanied and not one of them is now alive.

To me it was not a pleasure excursion and I am glad it is among

²⁵ In the fall of 1829 Stevens visited the Minnesota country with Alvan Coe in an investigation of the need of missions, and in 1835 he established the Lake Harriet mission. The Minnesota Historical Society has his diary from September 9, 1829, to April 2, 1830, and many of his papers. See also, Theodore C. Blegen, *Building Minnesota*, 104 (Boston, 1938).

²⁶ The difficulties between Stevens and the Pond brothers were not of such early origin as Pond here represents them, if one may accept the evidence in Gideon Pond to Mrs. Rebecca Hine, July 2, 1835, and Samuel Pond to Mrs. Sarah Pond, September 2, 1835, in the Pond Papers; Stevens to Greene, January 27, 1836, in the American Board transcripts; and Taliaferro to Samuel, September 2, 1836, in the Pond Papers. Two years later, however, the relationship was so strained that it was called to the attention of the American Board. Riggs in 1838 told Greene, the secretary of the board, plainly that Stevens would never be a success as a

the things that are past. I carried no book except [t] a Bible and there was no agreeable society to make me forget the discomforts that annoyed me. The society of the Indians and dogs was not always agreeable and they were not the only inhabitants of the tents. More than once I have been in winter weather to a distance from the camp—kindled a fire, and, stripping off my garments, held them in the blaze till I thought the inhabitants were singed out of them. But these annoyances and others worse than these were endurable and this seemed to be the quickest and indeed the only way to become thoroughly acquainted with the language, habits and character of the Indians. What I learned about them then was of great advantage to me afterwards in dealing with them. When I had been with them a month I left them far up on Rum River, and came home alone across a trackless region that I had never seen before, and, after traveling two days and one night, reached our house at Lake Calhoun and after kindling a fire with wood that G. had prepared for me, and parching and eating some corn that I found there, for I had eaten nothing in twenty-four hours, I wrapped myself in my blanket and had a comfortable nap for I had thrown my under clothing into the last fire I kindled on my journey home. I did not tell the Indians that I was coming home alone until I was ready to start for I knew they would be opposed to it. When I told them I was going they tried to dissuade me from it. The chief said it was a hazzardous journey for one to undertake alone, and if I was lost they should be blamed for it, and they were so much concerned about me that the chi[e]f sent his brother to overtake and accompany me, but he told me that after following me half a day he found my steps so long that he became discouraged and turned back. While I was gone that winter Gideon ha[d] a narrow escape from drowning. He started one morning to fodder cattle on the south side of Lake Harriet, and finding the ice firm near the shore he started on a run to cross the lake on it, but farther from the shore the ice was weaker, and he broke through in deep water, at a considerable distance from the land. As the ice was too weak to support him, he could make no progress toward shore

farmer or missionary, Dr. Williamson reported that Stevens was not popular with the Indians and could not learn their language, and Rollin Brown declared that Stevens was "unworthy the patronage of the Board." Riggs to Greene, October 24, 1838, Dr. Williamson to Greene, November 8, 1838, and Brown to the Prudential Committee, July 30, 1838, American Board transcripts.

except by breaking it, which he continued to do until he found it strong enough to bear him when he succeeded in getting on to it and thus escaped. I knew an Indian drowned because he could not get on to the ice though he had a knife in his hand to assist him in climbing.

When I returned from the hunt I wrote a few simple lessons and Miss Lucy C. Stevens a niece of Mr Stevens began to teach the Indian children Dakota, but this school was soon discontinued and a few half-breed girls were taken as boarders and taught English.²⁷

While I was absent that winter Dr. W. wrote to us requesting one of us to go up to Lac qui parle and aid them in studying Dakota, and G. who was not pleased with his situation at Lake H. proposed that I should go up and learn what he was expected to do at Lac q. p. if he went there: and I started on foot in February, and after a somewhat perilous journey during which I was caught in a prairie snow storm and was five days without food I reached Lac qui parle safe but hungry, and tired for I walked the last day a long distance in deep snow without any track. It seems strange to me now that we could perform those journeys exposed to the fiercest storms and sleeping out in the coldest nights with no protection from the inclemency of the weather except the clothing we wore by day and a blanket or buffalo skin, but in fact we did not expect to be comfortable. If we could avoid freezing it was about all we hoped for. When we encamped at night the first thing to be done was to scrape away the snow with our feet—kindle a fire and gather wood enough to keep it burning till morning. Then we sat by the fire with our blankets on our shoulders and our backs to the wind till we were sleepy. Then we drove ourselves into as small a compass as possible so that we could wrap our blankets all around us leaving out neither head nor feet. But our naps were short for either the cold or our cramped position would soon awaken us, when we stirred up the fire and sat by it till we were sleepy again, and thus we spent the night alternately sleeping and

²⁷ The school was started with six pupils, full-blooded Indian children, in the winter of 1835-36. Both Samuel and Miss Cornelia Lucy Stevens taught in this school. The boarding school was established for the half-breed daughters of white fathers who wished their offspring to be educated. Stephen R. Riggs, "The Dakota Mission," and "Protestant Missions in the Northwest," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3:116, and 6:128; Samuel Pond to Ruth Pond, March 3, 1836, Pond Papers; Stevens to Greene, January 27, March 1, 1836, and Greene to Stevens, April 20, 1836, American Board transcripts; Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1:195.

waking till the welcome daylight came when we could resume our journey and warm ourselves by exercise. I have spent more than one night thus alone, but not entirely alone for I was serenaded by wolves.²⁸

It was evident they needed help at Lac qui parle about the language for though Dr. W. was studying with characteristic diligence and perseverance he made little progress. With the help of a grammar and lexicon he could learn to read a language with tolerable facility, but he found it so difficult to learn to speak the Dakota that almost any other man would have been utterly discouraged. Mrs. Huggins was learning to talk with the Indians for her house was always full of them, and she was young and quick to learn, but th[e] Dr. would not have thought he could learn any thing from her.²⁹

My brother went up in the Spring of 1836 and remained there three years, aiding them greatly in acquiring the language and in obtaining translations from Mr. [Joseph] Renville.³⁰ As Mr Renville could neither read nor write the passage of Scripture to be translated was read to him, one verse at a time, and the Dakota written down as he dictated it.³¹ Wherever G. went much hard manual labor seemed to fall to his lot, and as he had aided Mr. S. in building at Lake Harriet, so he helped build Dr. W.s house at Lac qui parle, and he with a Frenchman sawed all the boards for the house by hand. In the spring of 1837, hoping to add something to his knowle[d]ge of their habits and modes of thinking he accompanied a small pa[r]ty of Indians who went up the Chippeway river in pursuit of game. When he had been with them a few days the tent in which he slept was removed to a distance from the others, and the first night after the removal all that were in the other lodges except two³² were killed by

²⁸ See Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries*, 74-86, and a manuscript in the Pond Papers entitled "Account of Journey of Samuel W. Pond to Lac qui Parle 1835." This manuscript is incorrectly dated.

²⁹ Mrs. Huggins was the wife of Alexander G. Huggins, who was stationed at Lac qui Parle as a farmer. See Gates, in *Minnesota History*, 16: 133-151.

³⁰ For an account of the colorful fur trader here referred to, see Gertrude W. Ackermann, "Joseph Renville of Lac qui Parle," in *Minnesota History*, 12: 231-246 (September, 1931).

³¹ An interesting description of the method of translating is given by Huggins in a letter of January 18, 1838, quoted by Gates, in *Minnesota History*, 16: 142, and owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

³² In the manuscript the word "two" has been crossed out and "three" written in pencil above it.

the Chippeway. He and an Indian gathered the scattered fragments of the bodies of the slain and buried them, and he went back to L. q. p. but his strength was nearly exhausted by labor and fasting.³³

I returned as I went up on foot but not directly to Lake Harriet, for I went to where our Indians were hunting muskrats south of the Minnesota about a days journey from Fort Ridgley, and here for the first time I found myself unable to conform to Indian modes of life. The Indians were subsisting on the flesh of Muskrats, for they were too intent on obtaining furs to spend their time or ammunition on any other game. A hungry man may eat muskrats in the winter with a good relish as I learned by experience at Mr. [Hazen] Mo[o]ers on my way up, but it was warm weather now and the ghastly heaps of carcasses denuded of their skins lying before the door of each tent were not only offensive to the sight, but they emitted an unpleasant odor which was borne on every breeze and tainted all the air.³⁴ I staid there two or three days hoping that hunger would give me an appetite, but my stomach revolted more and more against that disgusting food. A loons egg which a young man gave me was a precious morsel, which I ate one evening and, started the next morning for Mr. Moers who then lived near where Ft. Ridgley was afterwards built. The next day I walked to the Traverse [des Sioux] and thence home.³⁵

[To be continued]

³³ This massacre occurred in the spring of 1838, not in 1837. It was one in a long series of attacks and retaliations between Sioux and Chippewa. On this occasion the Chippewa, under Hole-in-the-Day, had come in an apparently peaceful mood to the Sioux tents, where they were feasted. After they had lain down to sleep together, each Chippewa, at a prearranged signal, knifed the Sioux sleeping beside him. Eleven Sioux were thus murdered. Pond gives the correct date in his "Indian Warfare in Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3:130. Compare Stevens to Greene, June 26, 1838, in American Board transcripts.

³⁴ Pond touches on the eating of muskrats in summer also in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 12:372. Mooers was a noted fur trader who entered the services of the American Fur Company about 1820 and who from 1823 on was in charge of various posts in Minnesota. See Grace Lee Nute, "Posts in the Minnesota Fur-trading Area," in *Minnesota History*, 11:377-381 (December, 1930).

³⁵ On Mooers's post, which was known as the Little Rock post, see Nute, in *Minnesota History*, 11:378, and a map on p. 354. For information about Traverse des Sioux, see Thomas Hughes, *Old Traverse des Sioux* (St. Peter, 1929); and Willoughby M. Babcock, "Louis Provençalle, Fur Trader," in *Minnesota History*, 20:259-268.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).