

## FAMILY PAPERS AND THE WESTWARD MOVEMENT

A COLLECTION OF old family letters is like a jig-saw puzzle. By piecing together bits of information from this letter and that, with a few clues from other records, one gets an interesting picture of family relationships and family activities. Take, for instance, the Humphrey family papers that have recently been filed with the Minnesota Historical Society. The collection was acquired by Mr. Jerome Baer of St. Paul, who, after noting that some of them were written from frontier Minnesota, offered them to the historical society. Like the pieces of a puzzle, these letters reveal the story of the Humphreys' migration to the West and their experiences in a new region.

The earlier letters, dating from the 1830's, are addressed to a Mr. Marcus Humphrey at Hudson, Ohio. Letters of the 1860's are addressed to a Mrs. N. M. Humphrey at Taylor's Falls, Minnesota. To determine whether Marcus and N. M. were one and the same person, the historian turns to the ponderous genealogy of the Humphrey family. There he finds Noah Marcus Humphrey, who was born in Connecticut, removed to Ohio in 1833, and in 1859 was married for a second time, to Elizabeth Allen Young, a widow.

On February 14, 1835, Stephen Humphrey wrote from Goshen, Connecticut, to his brother Marcus in Ohio: "O that we were settled in the Western Country on some pleasant farm; your last letter has given us all quite the Ohio fever." Stephen next heard that business was good in Illinois. He decided to go to Schuyler County, Illinois, and to move his household goods with his own team and covered wagon. He wanted Marcus to go along, and tried to persuade him by saying, "I think you will do better to get in to some new place and get in the business and grow up with the place."

But Stephen and his family went to Illinois alone and eventually removed to Wisconsin. Marcus' daughter Laura

(by his first wife) visited her Uncle Stephen at Beloit, Wisconsin, and wrote from there on August 3, 1862. She said that she expected to hear every day that her father and stepmother had started for Wisconsin. From the letter it appears that Marcus was planning to settle in Minnesota, and Laura hoped her father would take her along.

On October 6, 1862, Laura wrote from St. Paul to her stepmother, then living at Taylor's Falls, and inquired, "How are the Indians up there?" Mrs. Humphrey's mother was also worried about the Indians, for she wrote from Whitewater, Wisconsin, on November 24, 1862: "The Indian troubles commenced so soon after you was here I hardly thought you would go to Minnesota this fall . . . but I hope you will escape all peril from the Indians which I believe you will as all apprehensions on that score are I believe at an end."

Mrs. Humphrey was homesick in her new and strange surroundings at Taylor's Falls; but she had a unique cure for her ailment. A friend in Beloit congratulated her upon receiving consolation from watching logs float down the St. Croix River and wondering about their future destiny. The friend was the wife of a man at Taylor's Falls and she had heard that the prospect for the logs was rather poor. She remarks, "I think the whole company must be rather blue now adays. I think this will cure them of the prevailing log fever."

To complete the picture of the Humphreys in Minnesota, the historian can add a bit of information from the manuscript census records. The population schedules of the Minnesota state census of 1865 for Taylor's Falls list N. M. Humphrey; his wife, Elizabeth; his daughter, Laura; and Frank Young, Elizabeth's son by her first marriage, who is mentioned frequently in the letters. But who were these other Humphreys who are also listed as living in Taylor's Falls—Silas, Mary J., and Evy M.? The genealogy reveals that Silas was a nephew of Marcus. Silas'

father removed from Connecticut to Richfield, Ohio, in 1836, and Silas continued the trek westward by settling in Minnesota, probably at the same time as his uncle.

By 1870 still another family had been added to the Humphreys in Minnesota, according to the federal census of that year. Also living at Taylor's Falls were Mark, his wife, Helena, and his son, Silas W. Mark is readily identified as the son of the elder Marcus. The reason why he did not come to Minnesota earlier is found in the letters—he was serving in the Civil War. His sister Laura was anxious to get news from him after his regiment had been in a battle. According to one of her letters, the newspapers reported 138 men missing, and she was afraid that Mark had been taken prisoner.

The letters contain other references to the Civil War, and also to various diseases that were prevalent among children and adults. Light is thrown on N. M. Humphrey's career as a man of prominence in Ohio before his removal to Minnesota. After settling in Taylor's Falls, he was postmaster for many years, and he was elected probate judge of Chisago County in 1875.

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