

A "Craven Lad" in Frontier Minnesota

Edited by Bertha L. Heilbron

THE WESTWARD MOVEMENT usually is pictured in terms of settlers from the Atlantic coast country or from Europe who established homes and often made fortunes in a newly opened frontier area. Then, as the region was occupied, the pioneering urge sent some of the more venturesome newcomers still farther west, and the process of settlement was repeated on a more remote frontier. Occasionally, however, an individual is found who does not fit into the conventional pattern of settlement, for, after trying his hand at pioneering, he reversed his path and returned to the East or to Europe. In this group belongs Francis Wilkinson, the "Craven Lad" of the following narrative.

As a young man, Wilkinson lived in Skipton, the principal city of Craven, a district in West Yorkshire, England. In the summer of 1855, when he was twenty-four years old, he emigrated to America. "With mingled feelings of regret and hope," he records, "I bid farewell for a time to my native town—regret at leaving many kind friends behind—hope that I should be able to work out a fortune in that vast country." After sailing from Liverpool and spending several months in Boston, he turned his steps westward, traveling by rail via Buffalo, Cleveland, and Toledo, to Chicago. The young Englishman found American railroad accommodations to his liking; he was particularly pleased with such conveniences as berths at a dollar a night and free ice water. Although he was surprised and delighted with Chicago, a "bustling, flourishing town of considerable size," he did not want to stay there, for he confessed "an ardent desire to taste the romantic life of a primitive settlement." To satisfy that desire, he arranged to take passage on a steamboat going north on the Mississippi "as soon as the ice should break up."

At the head of navigation, in the vicinity of the Falls of St. Anthony, he found not one, but three, "primitive" settlements. There

he remained for a time, and there he seems to have made some progress toward acquiring a fortune. But apparently Wilkinson did not find on the Minnesota frontier the "romantic life" he was seeking, for, after a little more than two years, he moved on, going to St. Louis, Kansas City, and the gold fields of the Far West before returning to England in the late 1860's.

Fourteen years after his departure for the New World, in 1869, Wilkinson was living once more in Skipton, and there, in his hometown newspaper, the *West Yorkshire Pioneer*, he published his American "Adventures and Observations." A photostatic copy of the narrative, which appeared in several installments, was presented to the Minnesota Historical Society a few years ago by Mr. Charles L. Horn of Minneapolis. He obtained this interesting and unusual first-hand report of pioneer experiences in the frontier West from an English relative who married Wilkinson's son.¹ The portion of the narrative in which Wilkinson tells of his Minnesota experiences is reprinted in this magazine with Mr. Horn's permission.

¹ Much of the information given herein about Wilkinson is based upon letters from Mr. Horn to Lewis Beeson, July 12, 1943, and to Bertha L. Heilbron, July 3, 1946. The photostat of Wilkinson's narrative appears to have been made from clippings, only the first of which, published on March 6, 1869, is dated. An attempt to find a file of the *West Yorkshire Pioneer* containing the entire narrative was unsuccessful. Available finding lists of British papers in the United States do not include it, and an inquiry about the paper addressed to the British Museum brought a discouraging reply. It reveals that "the building containing the collections of English Provincial newspapers was completely destroyed by enemy action," and that such volumes as could be "salvaged had to be stored" until the time comes when a new building can be provided to house them. C. C. Shearcroft, superintendent of the British Museum's newspaper library, to Bertha L. Heilbron, October 8, 1946.

[From the *West Yorkshire Pioneer* (Skipton, England), March, 1869.]

HERE AND THERE IN AMERICA: ADVENTURES AND OBSERVATIONS OF A CRAVEN LAD

Francis Wilkinson

I THINK IT WAS in the month of April when the ice broke up on the Mississippi, and on receiving the news that the river was open for navigation, I quitted Chicago and travelled by railway to Galena, a distance of about 226 miles. Galena, at that time the terminus of the rail-roads west, is situated near the Mississippi river in the extreme north-west of the State of Illinois.² Arrived here, I lost no time in securing my passage in an old steamboat "The Hamburg" which was chartered for St. Paul, near to the falls of St. Anthony, a distance, as the river runs, of about 700 miles N. W. from Galena.³ Galena which was then a small mining town of, I should say, about 1,500 inhabitants, has now become celebrated as the former residence and place of business of the present president of the United States, General Grant.⁴ Leaving Galena, we steamed slowly down the Fever river into the Mississippi, which at this place is something like a mile in width. Here I may take the opportunity of saying that I feel my utter inability to give anything like an adequate description of what I saw during the five days spent on the steamboat "Hamburg" en route to St. Paul, indeed any attempt to trace on paper the wild and romantic scenery of this part of the Mississippi must be a lamentable failure—through extensive prairies, stretching away from the

² Galena is on the Fever River, a few miles above the point where it enters the Mississippi. Steamboats in the upper Mississippi River trade stopped regularly at Galena. It was reached by the railroad in 1855, when a branch of the Illinois Central was completed between Galena and Freeport. Federal Writers' Project (Illinois), *Galena Guide*, 74 (1937); Philip P. Williams, "Galena, Illinois, A Footnote to History," 46. The Minnesota Historical Society has a typewritten copy of the latter item—a paper prepared at Yale University in 1941.

³ The "Hamburg," a large side-wheeler, was in the St. Louis and St. Paul trade in 1856 and 1857. The distance between Galena and the Falls of St. Anthony by river is only a little more than three hundred miles. George B. Merrick, *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*, 273, 297 (Cleveland, 1909).

⁴ For an account of Grant's residence in Galena, see the *Galena Guide*, 43-49. Wilkinson underestimates the city's population, which reached its highest point in the 1850's. As early as 1850, Galena had more than six thousand people, and by 1858 its population had increased to fourteen thousand. *Galena Guide*, 39, 40.

banks of the river as far as the eye could reach — woods and forests of almost boundless extent through which steals the timid deer, pursued by the wily Indian — a crystal lake of surpassing beauty, through which the mighty river rolls almost unperceived.⁵ Steaming up the river we passed numerous sand-bars; these were invariably covered with large flocks of wild geese, and as each passenger carried a rifle or revolver, much amusement was caused by shooting at these geese from the boat. The sound of the discharge would re-echo from hill to hill. Occasionally a few Indians attracted by the sounds of our rifles, would come down to the banks of the river and hail us with their wild loo, loo, loo, loo, whilst in the distance we could often see the blue curling smoke ascending from their wigwams. We had more than one opportunity of making an examination of their wigwams (or lodges), as the “Hamburg” stopped at some convenient place to take in wood for fuel, as it usually did about twice a day. These wigwams differ from each other very little in appearance, being built with an eye to comfort rather than beauty. The poles which constitute the framework are driven into the ground in a circular form, these are then covered with the skins of wild animals, the bark of trees, the latter material greatly predominating. In shape they are like a sugar-loaf,⁶ and have a small aperture at the top to allow the escape of the smoke from the fire which burns in the centre of the wigwam. Unprepossessing as these structures appear on the outside, they are nevertheless water-proof and I should suppose pretty comfortable. Several of us went off the boat to examine one which was near to the river. Inside we found an old “squaw” (woman) busy cooking. Another squaw was skinning a deer, at which she was very expert, while her liege lord sat smoking his kennekaneck, (a kind of tobacco). A couple of greasy, copper-headed little papouses (children) were playing around, with their faces fantastically striped with some red colouring matter, and with beads and trinkets plaited in their hair. At intervals along the river, we should come across a place where some bold emigrant had

⁵ The reference is, of course, to Lake Pepin.

⁶ The sugar loaf of the mid-century was a cone-shaped mass of refined sugar.

marched into the woods, with his axe on one shoulder, and his rifle on the other, to do battle with the woods and forests and wild animals. A settler's life is one of hard and continuous manual toil. An attack is first commenced on the tall forest trees; with the wood thus obtained a log hut is built, having few pretensions to architectural beauty; by-and bye, with the aid of his axe, a few acres are cleared and the brushwood burnt, and after months of weary labour the ground is at length ready for cultivation. As I passed some of these places, and heard the sound of the settler's axe, and the crash of the falling trees, the bark of his faithful dog, and the tinkling of the cow-bells in the woods, the thought would often strike me "civilization has obtained a footing here;" could I revisit these now wild scenes some 50 or 100 years hence, perhaps I should find a flourishing, populous city.

At length we reached St. Paul in the territory of Wisconsin, the head of the navigation of the Lower Mississippi, distant about 2,000 miles from New Orleans.⁷ It was then a small town of about 2,000 inhabitants, and a more motley gathering I have seldom seen.⁸ It is the trading post of the Pembino half-breeds, a race—half French and half Indians—who live by hunting on lands adjoining the Hudson's Bay territory, and come down here in the spring to sell their furs and take back provisions for the winter. At the time of our arrival these half-breeds and other Indians had come down with their furs; the place was all astir—gambling, drinking, and fighting seemed to be the order of the day, and now, thought I, here I am in the far West.⁹ I stayed two days at this place, when, hearing of an-

⁷ Although the site of St. Paul was in Wisconsin Territory from 1836 to 1848, when Wilkinson arrived the town had been the capital of Minnesota Territory for seven years. See *Minnesota under Four Flags*, maps 11 and 12 (St. Paul, 1946). St. Paul is, of course, on the upper, not the lower, Mississippi.

⁸ An enumeration made in 1855 listed 4,716 inhabitants in St. Paul. J. Fletcher Williams, *A History of the City of Saint Paul*, 467 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4—St. Paul, 1876).

⁹ "The 'Red River people' are in town and trains will continue to come in for a month," reads an item in the *Daily Minnesotian* of St. Paul for July 1, 1856. The fact that Wilkinson found the Red River half-breeds in St. Paul gives a clue to the date of his arrival. Only a few days earlier, on June 26, the *Minnesotian* listed the "Hamburg," on which Wilkinson traveled upstream, among steambot arrivals. For a vivid account of the Red River cart trade, which carried to St. Paul from Pembina and other points on the lower Red River each season furs valued at thousands of dollars, and of the picturesque half-breeds who conducted it, see Williams, *Saint Paul*, 304-308.

other small settlement nine miles further up the river, I determined to visit it, and started off in company with a friend. We were obliged to walk, there being no other road but an Indian trail; when about half-way we espied, to our dismay, four Indians seated smoking under the brow of a hill, with their guns and tomahawks by their sides. We looked at each other, and then at the Indians, and then at our revolvers, for we both had revolvers, though we had never shot at anything but geese on the sand-bars; and the idea of being obliged to shoot at these dusky-looking customers in self-defence, was something new to us. Our path led pretty close to where they were seated, and after holding a short consultation we determined to proceed at all hazards; so, putting on a bold front, we advanced, keeping a sharp eye on all their movements, and they in turn eying us as keenly. However, they did not attempt to molest us; and when we had got well past them we took pretty long strides the remainder of the way to St. Anthony.

St. Anthony I found to be a small settlement containing about 1,000 inhabitants.¹⁰ It is on the left or east bank of the Mississippi, in the state of Minnesota (an Indian name signifying water-country, this state abounding in lakes, many of which are very extensive and of surpassing beauty).¹¹ The chief employment of the settlers was that of "lumbering," or "logging," a hard enough life, certainly, but by no means devoid of interest or excitement. These lumberers usually start off in groups and proceed up the river; after travelling a considerable distance, they then strike off into the immense pine forests and begin their arduous task of cutting down the pine, and other trees. When the trees are felled and all their branches lopped off, they are cut into logs of convenient sizes for being dragged to the river, to which they are taken and placed upon the ice. There these logs remain until the ice breaks up, when, away they go rolling,

¹⁰ St. Anthony and Minneapolis combined had from four to five thousand inhabitants in 1856. Of that number, about fifteen hundred were in Minneapolis. W. W. Wales, *Immigrants' Guide to Minnesota in 1856*, 28 (St. Anthony, 1856); *Daily Minnesotian*, November 12, 1856.

¹¹ "The Meaning of 'Minnesota'" is discussed by William W. Folwell in his *History of Minnesota*, 1:455-457 (St. Paul, 1921). Among various translations of the Sioux name given by this author is "sky-tinted water." Minnesota did not become a state until 1858.

ducking and tumbling one over the other, down the river, looking more like porpoises at play than inanimate blocks of wood. This expeditious and cheap mode of transit is much valued by the settlers, as, of course, all their logs are delivered "carriage paid." In case of injury or loss, however, there is the disadvantage of having no one to fall back upon for "damages." The logs are brought up at some convenient trading point, and a general re-assortment takes place; every "lumberer" having placed a distinctive mark on his logs, identification is a comparatively easy task.¹²

Close to St. Anthony are situated the celebrated falls of that name, on the river Mississippi, which is, at this point, I should say something over half a mile in width. No verbal description could realize the imposing spectacle here presented by the St. Anthony's falls. An ever-rolling volume of water, half a mile in width and from fifteen to twenty yards in height, must be seen before any idea is gained of its awful grandeur.

About five hundred yards below the fall, in consequence of a bend in the river, the spectator is enabled to take up a position on a considerable eminence, right in front of the centre of the falls. An enterprising Yankee, who owns this part of the river's bank, has not been slow to improve upon the natural advantage of the position, he has erected a frame-tower of wood about one hundred feet in height, and over the entrance are the words—

"Cheever's Tower,"
"Pay your dime and climb."¹³

A dime being equal to about fivepence, it is really worth that trifling sum, in addition to the fatigue of climbing, to be rewarded with the magnificent view which is gained when you reach the summit. Elevated considerably above the falls and the surrounding country, the prospect in whatever direction you turn is most impressive and wild, whilst beneath and stretching away for miles the majestic

¹² For an article on the methods used in transporting and marking logs, see Elizabeth M. Bachmann, "Minnesota Log Marks," *ante*, 26:126-137.

¹³ The tower or observatory was built by William A. Cheever on his claim near the present University of Minnesota campus. A contemporary description of 1855 is quoted by Marion D. Shutter in his *History of Minneapolis*, 1:658 (Chicago, 1923).

river rolls quietly and solemnly along to the embrace of its parent ocean.

I must here mention another very pretty sight in this neighbourhood, viz., the falls of Minnehaha, a name well known in this country to readers of Longfellow's "Hiawatha."¹⁴ There is a beautiful chain of lakes in this district which empty themselves into the Mississippi.¹⁵ Between the outlet of the last of these lakes and the river are the falls of Minnehaha. The stream, as regards the volume of water, is a very insignificant one, the falls being not more than some 25 to 30 feet in width, and from 35 to 40 feet in height, but as the water is precipitated over the rock it is broken into myriads of crystal drops, no part of it coming down in a stream; hence the Indian name "Minnehaha" (laughing-water). As the rock is an overhanging one there is a space of a few feet at the base, between it and the water. The spectator is thus enabled to get behind the water. I have stood there many times and the effect produced by the falling water is very pretty. Three miles below the falls of Minnehaha, and seven miles south of St. Anthony is Fort Snelling, a place built for the protection of the settlers against the Indians, to be used in any case of emergency. It is always garrisoned with a few soldiers belonging to the United States army. About 100 yards above the falls of St. Anthony in the middle of the river is a picturesque little island named after its discoverer, a Catholic Missionary, Father Hennepin. Hennepin Island is about 200 yards by 50 yards. There has recently been a suspension bridge thrown across from the mainland to the island, and on the island itself a number of saw-mills have been erected, the machinery of course being worked by water power.¹⁶ About 90 miles above St. Anthony there is a Missionary

¹⁴ Since Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* was published in 1855, it is possible that Wilkinson was familiar with the poem before he saw Minnehaha Falls for the first time.

¹⁵ Two of these lakes, Nakomis and Hiawatha, take their names from Longfellow's poem.

¹⁶ Father Louis Hennepin discovered and named the Falls of St. Anthony in 1680. The island which bears his name is below the falls, off the east bank of the river. Nicollet Island, above the falls in midstream, which is much larger than Hennepin Island, was connected with the settlement on the west bank of the river by a suspension bridge completed in January, 1855. Some time earlier a crude temporary bridge was built between Nicollet Island and the east bank of the river. In the middle 1850's sawmills that took advantage of the water power afforded by the falls were in operation on both

Station, named Crow Wing, to which I may have to refer in a subsequent letter.¹⁷ I must now recur to St. Anthony.

I took a fancy to settle, for a short time at least, in this wild and out-of-way place, and accordingly made hasty preparations for commencing business. In doing this I was most heartily welcomed and assisted by the people of St. Anthony, who gladly cooperate with any fresh arrival, especially, as in my case, if he be a young man.¹⁸ I had noticed on my first arrival in the village that five new wooden stores were being erected, and on enquiry, was told that one could be got ready for occupation in about two days. I was straightway installed as tenant, at a rent of £40 a-year. During the twelve months which I lived in this place, my business prospered far better than I at first anticipated it would do.

Soon after my arrival, St. Anthony was honoured by the simultaneous visits of two rival tribes of Indians, the Sioux and the Chippeways, numbering together several hundred souls. These tribes, though at endless war with each other, had through the intervention of the United States Indian agent, concluded a treaty of peace for the space of three days, whilst their respective hunting grounds were being changed.¹⁹ They came down the river together in their canoes, which were pulled ashore just above the falls. The squaws (who do all the drudgery whilst Mr. Indian struts about with his rifle over his shoulder) began to pitch the tents, which occupation lasted them until about noon. While this work was going on, the little papooses, who might otherwise have been troublesome, were suspended in

Nicollet and Hennepin islands. "Old Suspension Bridge and Its Successors," in *Minneapolis Sunday Times*, April 21, 1901; Shutter, *History of Minneapolis*, 120, 327-337.

¹⁷ The Reverend E. Steele Peake, an Episcopal missionary to the Chippewa, lived at Crow Wing. His mission station, however, was at St. Columba on Gull Lake. Henry B. Whipple, *Lights and Shadows of a Long Episcopate*, 30, 31 (New York, 1900).

¹⁸ Wilkinson is listed in the population schedules of the manuscript census of Minneapolis, not St. Anthony, for 1857. He is described as a tailor, twenty-six years of age. With him is listed Richard Wilkinson, a shoemaker, thirty years of age. The Minnesota Historical Society has photostatic copies of the 1857 census schedules.

¹⁹ Wilkinson is somewhat confused regarding Sioux-Chippewa relations, since no treaties were concluded between the two tribes in the 1850's. He might well have heard about earlier treaties, however, from some of the natives who passed through St. Anthony and Minneapolis in large groups. One such group, consisting of eighty Sioux, is reported in the *Minnesota Republican* of St. Anthony and Minneapolis for January 8, 1857; another, composed of several hundred Chippewa, is described in the same paper for June 4, 1858.

small wicker-work baskets, to the boughs of trees. This primitive method of disposing of a "domestic difficulty" reminded me forcibly of the old nursery rhyme —

"Rock-a-boo baby upon the tree top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,"

and truly these squaws have something more to do than rock the cradle. We were given to understand that the Indians had partaken of very little food for the last three days, and in consequence we collected for them a sum of money wherewith to purchase provisions. In return for this kindness, it was agreed amongst them, that the two tribes should dance us the war dance, which they accordingly did that same afternoon; but such dancing and such music, I never witnessed or heard before or since. The leading, in fact the only musical instrument in the band, was a drum, formed out of an old powder keg, covered at the ends with the dried skin of some wild animal. Upon this rude instrument, an Indian kept up a continual rattle with a couple of short sticks. The *harmony* being completed by three or four more Indians, squatted upon the ground, keeping up a continual buzz-z-z-z, buzz-z-z-z. The Indians (except the women who do not join in the dance) then formed in lines, each line being headed by a young brave, at some distance from the musicians; then began the dance which consisted of nothing more or less than a series of the most fantastic hops, skips and jumps; and which bore about as much resemblance to "the poetry of motion" as a grisly bear does to the graceful gazelle. Gradually advancing to the buzzing group on the ground, they then formed a semicircle, and finished the business by giving us the war-whoop—a burst of the wildest yelling and screaming that can possibly be imagined. I really had no idea before that such discordant and distracting sounds could issue from human throats! The day following this exhibition on the part of the Indians, I noticed a party of them flattening their noses against the windows of my store. Not being too favourably impressed with their personal appearance, I kept a pretty sharp eye on their movements, but almost before I was aware of the fact, so stealthily and cat-like were their movements, several

of them were inside the store, handling and examining anything that came in their way. They showed special delight in sundry broad grins at a few old English penny pieces, which I happened to keep in a little case on the counter. I in turn examined their tomahawks, and to my surprise found that most of them had been made in Sheffield, and bore the maker's name. At the end of three days the Indians took their departure to their respective hunting grounds.

The buildings, private and public in St. Anthony were all of wood. We had of course our wooden chapel; it was not remarkable for either convenience or architectural adornment.²⁰ It appeared however to be sufficiently commodious for the requirements of the settlers. Hymn books and bibles were by no means too plentiful. One little circumstance in connection with this chapel, indicative of our primitive style of life, struck me as being somewhat peculiar and at variance with the recognized modes of worship in civilized countries. Settlers residing at a distance from St. Anthony would leave their houses on Sunday morning, taking care to bring their guns or rifles with them, with these thrown over their shoulders, they would march into the chapel and coolly proceed to stack them in one corner of the building. Service concluded, they would then set their faces homeward, very liable, I am afraid, to disregard the preacher and his precepts should any choice game chance to come across their path in their journey.

As stated in my last letter, my business prospered, and increasing prosperity as is often the case, brought in its train ever-watchful and lynx-eyed ambition. I was by no means satisfied with being able to see my whole stock of worldly goods, confined within the limited dimensions of a wooden store. I would not be content until I tried a larger field of enterprise, and a newly settled district or country is certainly about one of the best places in the world in which to indulge a disposition of this nature to its utmost extent. Unnumbered opportunities present themselves in rapid succession.

²⁰ Several denominations were active in St. Anthony before Wilkinson's arrival. Among them were the Methodists, who erected a frame church at a cost of a thousand dollars in 1854. The chapel to which Wilkinson refers might well have been this church. See Shutter, *History of Minneapolis*, 1:603.

There appears to my mind to be something especially fascinating for most people in being able to rank themselves amongst the owners of the soil. There is an "aristocratic ring" in the words "landed proprietor," which I have no doubt is very charming, but why people should prefer this mode of investment to others of a more profitable nature I could never satisfactorily determine. Neither can I, for the life of me, make out why the honest tradesman who has made his £10,000, should be considered a "vulgar fellow," when compared with his fellow-mortal who has inherited a rent-roll of £500 per annum, and yet is the most consummate blockhead to be met with in a day's ride. Leaving these little social problems to be dealt with by wiser heads, I pass on to the subject in hand, wondering why I made the above digression.

I determined to buy a farm—but thereby hangs a tale, to which I invite the earnest attention of any intending emigrants, that they may learn, at all events, the preliminary part of the business to be gone through. Understand first, that a farm in the back woods of America and a farm in England are two very different things. In this country none but wealthy persons indulge in the luxury of farm-buying. In America, on the contrary, any man with a few hundred loose dollars in his pocket may purchase a farm of goodly size. The fact is, he there buys a farm very much in the sense that a sculptor buys a statue, when he purchases a block of marble—the raw material is there, the manufactured article will appear only after much toil, trouble, expense and anxiety. Again, the United States government, with a view to keep out speculators and encourage actual settlers, have imposed certain conditions, which all buyers of original lots must observe. Here is a district which has been surveyed, it consists of a tract of land six miles square. The district is divided into thirty-six sections, each section containing one square mile of land. These sections are again divided into half sections and quarter sections, a quarter section consisting of a superficial area of 160 acres. Thus, we have in a district one hundred and forty-four farms of 160 acres each, and in this shape it is offered for sale to the public. An intending purchaser selects his farm and procures its allotment to

himself; but before the bargain is completed, he must clear an acre of ground, build himself a hut or "shanty" eight feet by ten feet. This "shanty" must have a floor, a door and a window, and by way of furniture, it must contain a stove and a bed, he must call the place his homestead, and visit it at least once a month. When these conditions are complied with, he must pre-empt the property, pay down the purchase money—a dollar and a quarter an acre, and swear allegiance to the United States government; the farm then becomes his absolute property. If at any time, after its allotment and before its pre-emption, a man should not visit his farm for four consecutive weeks, any other man may procure its allotment to himself, taking advantage of all improvements made by his predecessor. This familiar method of obtaining a farm is called "jumping it."²¹

I procured the allotment of 160 acres or rather as I should say, 137½ acres of land only the remaining part of my claim happened to be a portion of a lake called Minne-tonka.²² Taking with me two men and a team of horses one cold winter's day, I started off into the woods to take my first lesson in the farming business, not without sundry misgivings as to my capability for the undertaking. Snow was pretty thick upon the ground, and our journey of eighteen miles was dull and dreary enough. Our only available road was an Indian main trail which we followed for a great part of the distance, but as our destination was about a mile out of this trail we were at length obliged to take to the woods, blazing the trees (chopping off pieces of bark) as we went along, to serve as guides on our return. After

²¹ For concise explanations of the Pre-emption Law of 1841, under which Wilkinson obtained his claim, and of the practice of claim jumping, see James Truslow Adams, ed., *Dictionary of American History*, 1:394, 4:330 (New York, 1940).

²² Wilkinson's land, comprising 156.18 acres, was in sections 5 and 6 of Township 117, Range 23, about five miles west of Wayzata on the west shore of Stubbs Bay. Although he obtained part of it by pre-emption, he secured the larger portion under a military land warrant issued "in favor of John FASTER, Sergeant in Captain Courtney's Company, Pennsylvania Militia, War 1812." A record of the transaction, dating from December 30, 1857, and a detailed description of the property, are contained in a letter of September 30, 1946, from I. S. Ingbretson, abstract officer of the Title Insurance Company of Minnesota, Minneapolis, to Mr. Horn, who furnished the Minnesota Historical Society with a copy. Another description of part of the land is to be found in the *Falls Evening News* of St. Anthony for December 12, 1857, which carries a "Notice" signed by Wilkinson and addressed to Laurens Spencer, "adverse claimant" to two of the Englishman's lots.

encountering many difficulties, we reached our journey's end about one o'clock in the afternoon, and at once began to look about for a convenient place upon which to erect our "shanty." Fixing upon a delightful spot on a small promontory overlooking Lake Minnetonka we went to work with a will, and the way we used our hatchets and made the chips fly was a sight worth seeing. Each man was his own architect, builder, and labourer; the result of this lucky combination of crafts was that within two or three hours my "shanty" was erected — there it stood in its beautiful and unadorned simplicity, a monument to our united industry, and about one of the most ricketty places in creation in which to spend a night. Though, to convince the officials of the Government that I was disposed to act in a spirit of liberality towards them, and did not begrudge them a few feet more or less of trumpery timber, my shanty was made 10 feet by 12 feet instead of the minimum 8 feet by 10 feet. Having thus put things tolerably "ship-shape," and made the best possible preparations for spending the night there, my two companions left me about four o'clock taking one of the horses with them and leaving me the other. We had kindled a fire, and after the departure of my companions I fell to chopping wood in order to keep the fire a-going. However simple the art of wood-chopping may appear, I did not make much headway, my hands (unused to work of this nature) were already much blistered, and being a bad marksman with a hatchet, I could not for the life of me hit the wood in the exact place where I wanted to hit it, nor could I hit any place twice in succession; indeed, many times I was in imminent danger of missing the tree altogether, and of doing myself some serious bodily injury. It soon became apparent that were I to chop wood all night, the fire would be but scantily supplied, if indeed I could keep it burning at all. What was to be done? To stay there without a fire would be perfect madness. Robinson Crusoe might — or might not — be happy when he could exclaim:

"I am monarch of all I survey,"

but I can assure my readers that it was far from pleasant to me thus to know that I was "out of humanity's reach!" The nearest in-

habited dwelling was about five miles away, at a settlement called Whyazetta, consisting of two or three shanties and an hotel.²³ The hotel was merely a place of accommodation for claim seekers. Thither I at length determined to go, and accordingly mounted my horse and rode off. It was exactly the place I wanted, for on looking at an unostentatious signboard over the door I saw the welcome news, "LOGINGS ERE FOR MAN AND ORSE." On this intimation I dismounted and was shown into what I suppose did duty for the "commercial room." It was a pretty large room, and quite as unassuming in appearance as the signboard outside. There was evident proof of a studied primitive simplicity in the arrangement and decoration of this room. No attempt at gorgeous display was there, to allure idlers and loungers to fritter away their time and money; for had Sam Weller himself been there with his "patent double-million magnifyin glasses o'extra power," it would have puzzled him to see anything more than a table, a ladder, a stove, and a few three-legged stools. After supper I went to bed; my bed was in an upper story and was reached by means of the ladder above-mentioned. During my sojourn in this part of America, I along with a companion, paid another visit to this hotel. It was on an intensely cold night, the thermometer standing at some 30 degrees below zero. Soon after we had gone to bed there was a thundering rattle at the door, and on its being opened, in bounded a troop of Indians along with a few trappers. They had brought their own whiskey with them and were evidently bent on "making a night of it." They immediately commenced card-playing and whiskey-drinking, which they kept up until three or four o'clock in the morning. The perfect babel of tongues was almost deafening, and we were shivering in bed from cold, although the stove-pipe came up close to the head of the bed. Almost every moment we expected some of the Indians coming up the ladder into the bedroom; this they did not do, however, but greatly to our relief took their departure at about the time above named. When we awoke in the morning the snow had penetrated

²³ Probably this was what was known as the Minnetonka Hotel, which was open at Wayzata in the spring of 1858. George E. Warren, *History of Hennepin County*, 239 (Minneapolis, 1881).

through the roof, and lay in considerable patches on the bed; and so intense was the cold that our condensed breath had actually become frozen on the pillow. So much for hotel accommodation in the backwoods.

During the spring or summer of 1858, I chanced to be a witness of an Indian battle. A party of white people were out in a steam-boat on the Minnesota river, and when about 15 or 20 miles from St. Anthony we came upon two tribes of Indians—the Sioux and the Chippeways, already mentioned—engaged in deadly conflict.²⁴ It was a mere guerilla affair, the combatants running, or creeping hither and thither, seeking shelter behind trees or any object which would afford temporary shelter; dodging round from spot to spot in order to get a chance of firing at an enemy. The squaws, although not actually engaged in fighting, would crawl about on their hands and knees endeavouring by every possible means to secure their own wounded warriors, or obtain possession of a fallen enemy for the purpose of burning his body. The battle lasted some two or three hours. After it was over we landed from the boat in order, if possible, to render assistance to any of the unfortunate wounded who might require it. We picked up I think about 16 men, some of them very seriously injured. One poor fellow I remember had received a nasty bullet wound in the jaw, which had also split his tongue, he must have suffered intensely, but bore the pain heroically. We took all the men on board the steam-boat, and conveyed them thence to St. Anthony, where they received such temporary medical attention as the place could command, after which they were sent off in another boat up the Mississippi to Crow Wing, to be dealt with by the U. S. Indian agent.²⁵ A few weeks after this battle I saw 26 Chip-

²⁴ The battle was fought near Shakopee on May 27, 1858. Passengers and officers on the "Antelope," a Minnesota River boat bound for Chaska, witnessed the conflict. A party of about a hundred and fifty Chippewa from Mille Lacs shot a Sioux who was fishing in the Minnesota River near his home village, thus instigating the battle. Edward D. Neill, "History of the Ojibways," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:502; *Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), May 27, 28, 1858.

²⁵ Neill reports that four Chippewa were killed and seven of the wounded went to St. Anthony, where they were treated by local doctors. Like Wilkinson, Neill mentions the Indian whose jaw was shattered. On the day after the battle, the wounded men boarded a steamboat bound for their homes on the upper Mississippi. See Neill, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:503. In the late 1850's, D. B. Herriman was agent

peways on the war-trail.²⁶ They came down through the streets of St. Anthony in single file, uttering their buzz-z-z and went—no one knew whither. Three days afterwards six of them returned, the remaining 20, I have no doubt, had been slain in battle. That fighting had been going on was apparent. The first of the six who returned carried in his hands, held up in front of his breast an iron hoop about 10 inches in diameter; across this loop was a piece of string, and on the string were fastened several scalps. The Indians appeared to be delighted with these bloody trophies of their valour, and returned as they had gone, in single file, with their everlasting buzz-z-z.

In the fall of '58 I determined to leave St. Anthony, and accordingly proceeded to clear out my stock-in-trade, and dispose of my farm. This latter article I had some difficulty with, until at last I came across a phlegmatic Dutchman, who seemed not only possessed of the needful capital, but desirous of driving a bargain with it.²⁷ After a few necessary preliminary questions on his part as to its general character, situation, &c., and a good deal of eloquence on my part as to its capability, fertility, and many other advantages "too numerous to mention," we started off in company to make a personal inspection, and clear up all dubious or disputed points. As we jogged along together, I began to fear lest my friend the Dutchman might want to see too much, for of course it would be quite natural on his part to take as general survey of the farm as was possible, but how was I prepared to comply with his wishes in this respect? I had only visited the farm some five or six times, had never been round it in my life, and knew very little about it, except that by far the greater part of it was covered with trees, including, as I was told by the government surveyor, some 40 acres of black walnut timber—

to the Chippewa at Crow Wing. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Reports*, 1855, p. 54, 1857, p. 54 (Washington, 1856, 1858).

²⁶ "Between 300 and 400 Red Lake Chippewas passed through Minneapolis on Saturday," reads a news item in the *Minnesota Republican* for June 4, 1858. Wilkinson evidently saw some of these Indians.

²⁷ The land was transferred by Wilkinson "to Arthur Conlon by Warranty Deed dated July 15, 1858 for \$450.00," according to Mr. Ingbretson's letter of September 30, 1946. It seems likely that the "Dutchman" mentioned in the narrative located the land and made the purchase for Conlon.

though (to confess my ignorance) I did not know a black walnut tree from the commonest tree in the forest! I was however obliged to make the best of such knowledge as I did possess, trusting to the chapter of accidents to bring me through. I knew the way to my "shanty," and determined to make that place our starting point. My "improvements" being about there, I calculated that the Dutchman's "first impressions" would not be unfavourable ones, whatever might turn up afterwards. Arriving on the spot, lo! my shanty was nowhere to be seen. Could I have lost my way? No. Catastrophe number one! The Indians had burnt my elegant homestead to ashes, everything had disappeared with the exception of the sheet-iron stove, which, like some faithful Milner's safe, had survived the general conflagration. There we left it "alone in its glory," and for aught I know to the contrary it may be standing there yet. From this spot we turned away into a large swamp-meadow, consisting of some 30 to 40 acres. Thought I, if "Mynheer Von Dunck" can only be kept in the open space all will go well. Alas for my hopes! He proposed that we should strike into the woods and view the farm on the opposite side to where we then were. "Oh yes, certainly," said I aloud. "Now for it," thought I to myself, "We shall be lost in the woods that's certain," for I could no more have walked the boundary line of my farm, than I could have crossed the broad Atlantic in the Rob Roy canoe, without compass. Away we started, and after wandering about for some time — catastrophe number two! — lost in the woods, uncertainty in my own mind as to whether I am showing the Dutchman *my* property, or that of *some other person*, an hour and a half's dubitation we then emerged from the woods on to the Indian main-trail, and about a mile away from the nearest point of my farm. My companion was evidently satisfied with his survey, and thanks to the steaming hot day and the troublesome mosquitoes, he proposed that we should return to St. Anthony at once. I can assure you I was not slow to indulge him on this point; so returning for our horses we made the best of our way home.

Next day our bargain was completed. My stock-in-trade was already cleared out, and in a few days I bid adieu to St. Anthony. In

taking leave of the place, it will not be inopportune to mention that during my stay there the population of the place increased very rapidly—new settlers were constantly making their appearance, a thriving trade sprang up, and St. Anthony may now be classed amongst the many small but thriving towns in the far west. It can now be reached by rail, and, of course, in a much shorter time than when I first went there.²⁸ Opposite to St. Anthony, on the other side of the Mississippi, stands Minneapolis, a town which in a few years has made wonderful progression. When I first went into that neighbourhood Minneapolis consisted of about fourteen “log shanties:” it now numbers, I suppose, some 10,000 or 12,000 inhabitants.²⁹ I ought to have mentioned previously that on the very spot where I saw the Indian war-dance, on my arrival, there is now a State University, which cost some £20,000 in building.³⁰

²⁸ Railroad connections between Chicago and the Minnesota settlements on the upper Mississippi were not completed until 1868. The earliest line between Minneapolis and Chicago ran through Austin, McGregor, Iowa, and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin; a pontoon bridge over the Mississippi connected the latter communities. The trip took more than thirty hours. Folwell, *Minnesota*, 3:2; Shutter, *History of Minneapolis*, 1:280.

²⁹ In 1870, a year after Wilkinson published his account, Minneapolis had 18,080 inhabitants. Shutter, *History of Minneapolis*, 1:675.

³⁰ The University of Minnesota did not open its doors to college students until the fall of 1869, some months after Wilkinson's narrative was published. A building erected on the site a decade earlier, however, was used as a preparatory school as early as 1867. Theodore C. Blegen, *Building Minnesota*, 314 (Boston, 1938).



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