FRONTIER BUSINESS TRIP
Reminiscences of MRS. JOSEPH ULLMANN

ALTHOUGH the following account was written by a pioneer St. Paul woman, it pictures in vivid and dramatic fashion some of the trials endured by the frontier businessman. The trip here described was made by the writer with her husband, Joseph Ullmann, a St. Paul merchant, in March and April of 1857. To Dubuque, Galena, Chicago, and St. Louis—all important markets on which the remote communities of the upper Mississippi depended for supplies—he went to replenish the dwindling stock of goods on the shelves of his Jackson Street store. Over its counter he sold to retail merchants in wholesale quantities such staples as coffee, tea, and sugar, as well as foreign and domestic wines, liquors, and cigars "of the various grades."

This narrative gives ample evidence that in the growth and settlement of the frontier, the businessman played a role that at times bordered on the heroic. What he faced when he undertook to supply his neighbors not only with luxuries, but with the most common necessities, is here graphically portrayed. By traveling to market under conditions that often involved real danger, he purchased for home consumption the goods obtainable in frontier stores. Their great variety is suggested in the columns of St. Paul newspapers and other publications of the 1850s. There local merchants advertised stocks of hardware and cutlery, crockery and glassware, lamps, books, wallpaper, boots and shoes, "fancy and staple dry goods," shrubs, trees, and seeds, and even pianos and melodeons. It was the merchant who made these things available, and in order to obtain them he was obliged to travel under conditions like those described in the following pages.

This is the second section to appear in this magazine from Mrs. Ullmann’s lengthy reminiscences, written in 1896. An earlier installment, in which she tells about life and conditions in St. Paul as she found them during her first year there, was published in the spring of 1953.*

See "Spring Comes to the Frontier," in Minnesota History, 33:194-200 (Spring, 1953).

THE STAGECOACH pictured above is reproduced from the Minnesota Messenger, 48, where it appears with an advertisement of "Rice & Myrick, stage proprietors and livery stable keepers, in the rear of the American House," St. Paul.
THE ENTERPRISING St. Paul merchant started sometimes as early as February for St. Louis or the East to lay in his stock of summer goods. The river not being navigable the first part of the journey, as far as Dubuque, must be made in sledges over the prairie. At Dunlied [Dunlieth], across the Mississippi, was the western terminus of a railroad line to Chicago. In these days of improved means of travel the hardships of such a journey can be scarcely realized.

My husband looked aghast when I proposed in 1857 to accompany him to St. Louis. It is impossible for a woman to make such a trip, he said, and men undertake it with fear and dread. “I am younger than you and equally as strong” was my concluding and decisive argument. So in spite of advice and of even the offer of a hundred dollars for a new fur cloak from my husband I determined to go.

At 9 o’clock on St. Patrick’s day we put a carpet bag with several roasted fowls and some wine, and a trunk with the clothing that we would require, into the “mail coach” and then climbing in ourselves were ready for the start. The conveyance was from a courtesy that had extended over from the summer months called the mail coach; it was, however, two sledge runners with a wooden bed crossed by board seats. The sledge bed was filled with straw and a rake was furnished each traveler; but sad, indeed, would have been his plight should he not have supplied himself well with wraps and furs. The team was two horses useful more because they were hardened to the severe climate than that they were speedy. Besides ourselves the passengers were two St. Paul merchants and we were all booked through to Dubuque.

The driver yelled at his horses, cracked his whip with a great flourish and we were off at a good, steady pace towards the south in a crisp, frosty air and a bright sunshine. We were scarcely two hours under way, when the weather, so propitious for a pleasant journey at starting, had changed. Dark clouds rolled over our heads and soon we were in the midst of a dense, driving snow storm that cut off the sight of everything beyond a few feet of the sledge. At the first stopping place, fifteen miles from St. Paul, the wareried horses were taken from the vehicle and fresh ones put in their stead. The halt was not more than fifteen minutes and we were on again into the storm.

The snow came down during the day without cessation hiding all traces of the road and drifting in high banks. As the driver and the horses had only the stretch from one changing station to another to know, they found their way by a sort of instinct; for there was nothing so far as we could see in the darkness of the storm and the approaching night to mark it. The way at the best was scarcely more than a trail, and a driver unfamiliar with it would have certainly been lost. Seven o’clock we arrived at our second stopping place and where we were to remain for the night.

Cottage Grove was the pleasantly suggestive name given to the place. However agreeable Cottage Grove may have been at some other season of the year, on that stormy night it looked only like a log hut stuck down in a snow drift. The accommodations were of the most primitive kind; in fact, the hut was hardly more than a frontier shelter where lodging, food and drink were supplied. A plain supper of bacon, baked...
potatoes and bread was set before us, and under the genial influence of a cheerful wood fire blazing in a wide, open fireplace we almost forgot the storm that raged without. The sledge from the south had already arrived; and the passengers having gone to bed their furs were hung up around the room to dry. So familiar were we all with one another in St. Paul that when my husband saw a fur coat on the wall he said that the Sheriff or Dr. Alberti was in the house."

It was not difficult to sleep after the experience of the day; and when we were told to be ready to start the next morning at 4 o'clock we went to the sleeping quarters that had been assigned to us. When morning came the snow had drifted around the house and stable so high that the driver was forced to spend an hour or more that we intended for travel in digging out his team and sled.

My husband was correct in his surmise of the preceding night; the Sheriff was one of the guests at Cottage Grove. He had come over the route, he said, and knew of its hardships. When he found that he could not persuade me to return with him to St. Paul, he gave me his heavy fur gloves saying that they would be of use to me before the end of the journey.

The heavy snowstorm of the preceding day had buried every trace of the road. Through the great drifts the horses ploughed their way buried up to their bodies in the snow. Sometimes the sled slid along upon a frozen surface, and, then breaking through the crust, sank down and we were pulled through a pile of snow, the loose masses flying back in our faces and covering our clothes and furs. An hour out the poor horses sank into a drift so far that they were almost lost sight of; they floundered about wildly in the white mass, dragged the sled after them into the depth of the drift, and then exhausted refused to go farther. The driver and the three men set to work and after a long delay finally cleared the way sufficiently for the team to move. Incidents of this character were of frequent occurrence; we knew not how often we might be stopped by a drift, or the sled overturned and we tumbled out into the snow.

Sixty miles must be made this second day; the drivers were forced to reach the changing station on time or within an hour or so of it even if they must cruelly urge the horses all the way. These changing places were about fifteen miles apart and upon the arrival at each the poor animals were ready to drop from sheer exhaustion. The stop which was made at or near noon was the longest of the day, generally about a half hour time in which we could get "dinner." This meal, or by any other name than dinner, was invariably bacon, baked potatoes, biscuits and tea; the price one dollar or a dollar and a half. Instead of "tea" we might have had "coffee"; but the difference was only in name. Fresh meat or eggs it was impossible to obtain; they were never brought in Winter to these far-away places.

The miseries of the forenoon had their counterparts in the afternoon. We floundered on through the snow in a dark and heavy atmosphere, intensely cold and filled with flying particles of snow that striking our faces burnt and blistered them. The scene was the intense gloom of Winter without any of its life or brightness: a cover of white upon which there was no evidence of human existence or even animal life save the winter birds that were hardy enough to withstand the rigor of such a climate; there was either the open prairie that disappeared in the gloom of the snow clouds and swept by a cruel wind, or the sparsely wooded tracts where the black trunks and leafless boughs intensified the sombreness. Darkness came and we were still miles away from the prescribed end of the day's journey. The horses ploughed on into the night making their way through the snow as they went. We passed

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no houses nor saw a human being except the men at the changing stations.

It was 9 o'clock when at last the weary horses drew up before a log hut whose dim light through the windows we had seen sometime before. The sixty miles had been traveled but at the cost of great exertion and urging of the panting, exhausted team. We were now ninety-five miles from St. Paul and still farther from any town towards the south. The place at which we stopped was a log hut larger than the houses at the stations for changing horses on the route. The long side of the building was towards the road, a door in the middle of the front and a window to the right and left to light the two rooms on the side of the entrance. The barroom was upon the left and separated from it by a rough board partition was the "sitting room" which also served as the dining room. The sledge from the south had already arrived and the driver and some of the passengers were smoking poor tobacco in the barroom and the fumes permeated the place. So blinded were we by the snow that at first we could scarcely see upon coming into the lamplight. We were compelled to grope painfully around the room and in almost total blindness for several minutes awaiting the return of our sight.

The ordinarily prepared meal had been exhausted in feeding the early arrivals; it was thus necessary to get something "extra" for us. How quickly the vision of a good supper, that had cheered us up to endure the hardships of the day until the end of the journey, disappeared when what we were expected to eat was set before us. A cloth stiff from grease and dirt, a fork with broken prongs, a knife with a greasy wooden handle was the spread; a dish of greasy looking liquid in which floated a piece of fat pork, boiled potatoes with the dirt remaining upon them, and a piece of sad, heavy, hot bread made up the meal. As hungry as I was I could not eat this stuff. My husband chided me for being fastidious. "You should never complain at home if you relish this meal," was my rejoinder.

Where are we to sleep, I asked. The landlord pointed to the loft and a wooden ladder that lead up to it. My husband climbed up and beneath the rafters stretched upon the straw wrapped in their furs were the guest[s] who had already retired to rest for the night. I objected to being another sleeper in this place and with a blanket they curtained off the corner of the room beneath the ladder. After midnight, when every man in the house had climbed up the ladder carrying with him his furs, I ventured into my improvised sleeping apartment and lying down upon a straw tick with my clothes still on, tried to sleep. From the intense cold of the room when the fire had died out, and from nervousness induced by hunger and weariness, I passed a restless, sleepless night.

Before the men came down from the loft I had arisen; and, soon after daybreak I began, breakfastless, and almost as weary as when I had arrived the night before, the third day's journey. A few hours out and we came to a stream, the bridge over which had been swept away and a temporary structure had been built upon the beams. Over this the passengers could cross and save the long ride around which the driver made in finding a place to go over upon the ice. The frail bridge creaked and moaned under every step that we made. Only one person could cross at a time; and it was necessary to crawl clinging to the beams to keep from being blown off by the gale that swept through the narrow gorge.

At the first changing station, it was necessary to make repairs of the sledge broken in crossing this stream, and we took advantage of the delay to eat some of the provision that we had brought. But it was frozen so hard that I became soon afterwards quite ill and we threw away the remainder. The bill of fare for dinner for which two dollars was asked at the noon station was boiled beans and bacon and bread. It did not tempt me to alight. By dint of much persuasion and the payment of a liberal fee my husband succeeded in getting for me two boiled eggs. The way was somewhat broken by the pas-
sage of the sledge from the south; the day's journey was thus more easily made than the preceding, and at dusk we arrived at a small collection of houses at the edge of the forest. One of the largest of the houses was the inn and here we were furnished accommodations more satisfactory than anywhere else on the route.

When we left here the next morning it was with many more passengers. There were twelve persons in the sled, four squeezed upon each of the board seats, the two at the ends clinging desperately so as not to be jostled off by irregularities of the roadway. Had there been supports, at the backs of the seats, half the number might have been comfortably seated in the conveyance.

Scarcely were we under way than a snow storm of a severity such as I had never before experienced in the Northwest closed in around us. The wind blew with a terrific velocity over the open prairie and the frozen snow beat down with such cruel force that one dared not expose his face or hands. I tried to balance upon my lap a band box in which I was carrying some feminine finery. In an unguarded moment the wind lifted up the box and strewed its contents in shreds far out over the prairie. The men in the front seats attempted to protect themselves with umbrellas, the wind and snow riddled the covers as if they were paper. All day long we faced this terrible pelting fire of frozen snow. I was so weak and exhausted by the exposure that when the last stopping place for the day was reached I could not walk unsupported from the sled to the inn. Strawberry Point was the name given to this station on the route.® Why, no one appeared to know. “Perhaps because it is not a point,” our hostess suggested, “and because such a thing as a strawberry never grew here.”

But in spite of all the hardships of the day’s journey we were not to remain at Strawberry Point over night. An hour’s rest we were to have and then on during the entire night. Many of the passengers suffering from the tortures of the blizzard pleaded with the driver to permit them to rest until at least midnight. To continue on in this frightful storm in an open sled, they said, was beyond human endurance. They even offered him a purse of twenty dollars if he would make the delay asked for. He was forced to go on, he replied, in order that the mail which was carried could be gotten through according to the company’s contract.

Sixty miles had been traveled during the

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® Strawberry Point is in the southeastern corner of Clayton County, Iowa.
day and we were more than two hundred miles from St. Paul. In order to reach Dubuque within the prescribed time, it was imperative that we travel not only during the entire night but also part of the next day. The journey was resumed in the darkness and the storm. Greatly to our delight, however, about 11 o'clock the clouds had passed away and we were under a clear, starry sky. We were going over the open prairie of northern Iowa, the forests had been left behind and there was only the great white plain reflecting the brilliancy of the heavens.

No habitations of man were to be seen except the huts at the changing stations on the route. In the brightness of the night these could be seen far ahead like black blots in the great field of white. Coming nearer we could distinguish the lighted lantern of the stable man as he brought out the horses to take the place of those we were driving; or the dim light burning in the barroom as a beacon of hope to the passengers who wished to fortify themselves against the cold by a drink of bad whiskey. Some of the men rushed in the barroom of the first station but came quickly out. “It’s a temperance place,” one said in disgust. Iowa evidently early began her application of the principles of temperance and prohibition.

The horses were quickly changed and again we were away with the starry sky above and that unending sheet of white around us. It was too cold for conversation, and we moved silently on muffled in our furs and crowded closely together endeavoring to keep off the chill. Four o’clock in the morning the driver halted at the bank of another stream from which the bridge had been carried away. Planks had been put over the current near the bank where the ice was cut, and by these we were expected to cross while the sledge was taken to a safer crossing down the stream. I slipped when I stepped upon the boards and before the men behind could catch me I was in the water over my shoe tops. I had no opportunity to change my wet shoes and stockings, as our trunk could not be opened, until the next stopping place at 8 o’clock in the morning. . . . For four hours I rode shivering from cold and laid the foundation for a severe illness that has ever since remained with me. . . .

As we went farther south, the influence of the sun’s heat became more apparent and the snow was less and less. At the next stopping place the sled was abandoned that the remainder of the journey might be made in a covered wagon. There were places in this vehicle for only eight of the twelve passengers. The four others were left in spite of their remonstrances and threats of heavy lawsuits against the company for detention, in this little prairie town to await another mail coach or take their chances at getting farther on.

The road was merely a trail that went over or around hills as was most convenient, through brush and across fords. From early thaws the way was washed full of ruts and hollows; the wheels stuck deep in the mud or slid sideways down steep embankments. We

were jolted and jarred, and pitched from one side to the other of the wagon. Sometimes the vehicle was overturned; again, the wheels were so deep in the mud that all the passengers were compelled to get out in order that it might be moved. The streams were all high, and in many places the fording was fraught with the greatest dangers. Once, we were in water over the hubs of the wheels, and at another time the wagon and horses were almost carried down stream by the force of the current.

At 4 o’clock in the afternoon we were rejoiced to see Dubuque. The thirty hours continuous riding in the cramped, uncomfortable position and the bruises and battering from the jolting and tossing of the wagon made me so stiff and weak that I could move only with great pain when we at last stopped before the door of the St. Julian hotel.*

THE WARMTH of the room at the St. Julian was at first grateful; but as the cold that had accumulated in my body from the long journey began thawing the sensation was most unpleasant. Every joint ached, every muscle pained, and my face was as if afire; I seemed to be living over all the miseries of the journey.

When dressing for dinner the next day I saw for the first time after leaving St. Paul my face in a mirror. The part which had not been protected by my hand was the hue of an Indian; it looked as if a reddish brown oval had been painted around my eyes and nose. The appearance was so grotesque that in spite of the pain I had to laugh.

The third day after our arrival my husband was informed that two men were dragging persons across the Mississippi in a boat through the water upon the top of the ice. He was desirous of proceeding on to Chicago; and too impatient to await two or three days when the Captain of the ferry had said that a boat could cross. We drove down to the landing. The heavy rain of the preceding night had covered the ice to the depth in some places of almost a foot. The crossing looked decidedly dangerous; and acquaintances who had come down with us advised strongly against the attempt. After some hesitation, however, the offer of the two men to take me across in a skiff for two dollars was accepted. The men pushed and dragged the boat in a zigzag course through the deepest water, carefully picking their way and looking out for breaks and air holes.

The river at this point is very wide; and when we had reached the middle I looked back and saw my husband and another man who had agreed to accompany us wading through water more than half way to their boot tops, far behind. “Stop,” I cried to the boatmen, “Wait for those gentlemen. If we are to be drowned, and it looks very much as if we shall, let us all go down together.” By the dispensation of some special providence we were not drowned; but came in the boat to the broken ice on the Illinois side and from there reached the bank by means of planks. Many persons had been watching our crossing from the banks of the river, and when we stepped upon dry land they cheered us heartily.

It was a ride of half an hour by the train from Dunlied to Galena; we remained there.

* The reference is to the Julian House, a well-known Dubuque hostelry. See History of Dubuque County, Iowa, 668 (Chicago, 1880).
for two days and then started for Chicago. There was in those days a degree of insecurity about the road bed and bridges of this new railway in the most favorable weather, and this was intensified every Spring when the heavy rains and thaws set in. That the train was stopped soon after leaving Galena by a bridge over one of the streams being partly carried away from its piers, seemed not to have much surprised the passengers. They alighted from the cars, half walked, half crawled along the bridge beams and then waded through black mud and slush about two miles to the next station.

The station house was a little frame structure set down along the railroad and in the midst of land, marshy and partly covered with water. Around the little cannon stove in this house the passengers all crowded in an unsuccessful effort to keep off the chill. Two hours passed and no chance of getting away appearing, some of the men went foraging over the country. The village, for which the house where we were waiting was the station, was a mile or more away on a muddy road; to reach the nearest farm house a long detour was necessary on account of the impassable condition of the marsh. The chances of getting food were thus not favorable; and one man, who came back with a piece of pie and two boiled eggs for which he had paid an exorbitant price, was the most successful.

Four hours had been spent at this station, when at 2 o'clock in the afternoon a train backed down and carried us on to Chicago. Independent of the four day's rest which were absolutely necessary, the journey from St. Paul to Chicago had consumed five days and one night. Of the great contrast between the comforts of modern travel and the discomforts of earlier days, I thought a few years ago when in the station at St. Paul I retired to a berth in a palace car and slept through uninterrupted until [I] awoke the next morning at Chicago.

Chicago was in the throes of the spring thaw and rain. Of this western metropolis, there was then nothing not even the streets, that would be today a landmark. Its appearance was that of a big village street down in the mud. The impression was less favorable than that of St. Paul. Sidewalks were in course of construction along several streets; they were not yet finished all the way on Lake street, where was situated the hotel at which we stayed. After wading out for a short distance in the mud I abandoned a shopping expedition and returned in disgust to the hotel.

The evening following that of our arrival at Chicago, we departed for St. Louis, arriving the next morning. My desire was to visit my friends there; but the effect of the journey told so severely upon me, that I was ill, confined to my room, for the two weeks that we remained in St. Louis. Except a ride of a few hours through the streets, I had seen nothing of the city, when one morning my husband announced that he should return immediately to St. Paul.

FROM St. Louis to Galena; and from there to Fond du Lac [?], where matters of business made it necessary for us to stop, were not unpleasant modes of travel. At Fond du Lac we had a muddy walk from the landing to the hotel, a modest place of entertainment, that should more properly have been called a boarding house. The proprietress did everything in her power to make us comfortable. To our request for a good supper, she brought the unvarying bill of fare. . . .

No one appeared to have any idea when the steamboat that was to take us farther up the river would arrive; and, in order to have rest and to be not left behind, a man was employed to watch for the light of the boat. At one o'clock at night we were aroused by the cry, “Boat in sight.” We rushed out of the hotel and hurried through the mud, carrying part of our clothes on our arms, down
to the landing. The stop of the vessel here was short, and the Captain was about to give the order to go ahead when we appeared. I had been aboard only a few minutes when I discovered that the steamboat was the Editor on which I had made my first trip up the river. The steward recognized me as one of his former passengers, brought us refreshments and looked after our comfort; but, on account of the crowded condition of the boat, was unable to give us a stateroom.

Bay City, at the foot of Lake Pepin, was as far north as the Editor could go, the lake being still frozen over. The delays which were annoying to travelers, were enjoyed by the people of the little town. The few houses that went to form the place were stretched out in a line along the river front. Every one was at this season of the year open for the reception of delayed travelers. We acted on the suggestion of one of our party, who said that while as all the accommodations were most likely the same, the house with the painted front gave evidence of more cleanliness. Our waitress was a pleasant faced old woman who wore a tall white cap not unlike that worn by the peasants in parts of Brittany. Her spryness and brightness made a pleasing impression; and she was a favorite and highly respected, I discovered, among the woodmen and boatmen who came to the place.

The next morning as soon as we had finished breakfast, the first thought was to get farther on. After considerable searching a farmer was found who would take us around the lake to Red Wing. He came to the hotel at 8 o'clock with a dead axle wagon, the bed crossed by boards for seats, and we started. Besides my husband and myself there were four persons, three men and one woman, in the party. The distance was forty miles mostly along the edge of the lake. No road had been made and the farmer followed a trail, jolting us over rocks, brushing us by limbs and bushes; sometimes upon a bluff, and then close down to the shore of the lake. The woodman's axe at the start could be heard far up in the forest, but the sound soon died away and we appeared to be beyond the limits of civilization; for we saw not a house, not even a woodman's hut, nor a human being after leaving Bay City. Seen from a softer seat than a rough board put across the

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11 The "Editor" was in the St. Louis and St. Paul trade from 1854 to 1857, according to George B. Merrick, Old Times on the Upper Mississippi, 266 (Cleveland, 1909). Mrs. Ullmann, who first traveled upstream on this steamboat in May, 1855, describes it in some detail in the opening chapter of her reminiscences.

12 In referring to "Bay City" both here and in the earlier installment of her narrative, in Minnesota History, 35: 198, Mrs. Ullmann's memory is at fault, since Wabasha and Read's Landing are at the foot of Lake Pepin. Lake City, which she may have had in mind, is about ten miles beyond on the west shore of Lake Pepin.
bed of a farm wagon, the wonderous national beauty of the scene would, no doubt, have been enchanting; but, kept clinging to the seat for fear of being tumbled out by the continuous jolting over rocks and fallen logs, the glimpses that we had were fragmentary. The shore of the lake seemed curiously strewn with immense boulders as if left there by giants after a frolic. The untrodden forest climbed dark and gloomy up the hillside on the right; while upon the left was the surface of the lake covered with a sheet of white and far away in the distance the dim lines of the woods and prairie of the opposite shore.

A storm of wind and rain that changed to sleet and hail came upon us in the afternoon, and in spite of oil cloths and cloaks we arrived dripping wet at Red Wing. The farmer, more intent upon quickly earning his money than in giving an easy ride, had by recklessly jogging along over the uneven way brought us to the head of the lake in eight hours. The landlord of the Red Wing hotel was not glad to see six dripping figures coming into his house already filled with guests. With reluctance he allowed us two women to enter the "parlor"; but, when my husband came to ask if we wished anything, he gruffly said, "Cant go in there: Gents aint allowed." We could remain, the landlord said, if we would accept the accommodations he would give us. This was a bed in a large room in the upper story where sleeping places could be arranged for forty or fifty persons, or a bunk in the hallway. I refused to sleep in either place except as a last resort. We left the house with little regret when one of the men returned from a tour of investigation and reported that he had succeeded in finding pleasant rooms, a more genial host and had prepared a good supper which was awaiting us. But before we came to this resting place, it was necessary to wade through mud that appeared to have no solid earth beneath.

Contrary to our expectation we found that the river was not open to St. Paul and the next day the important question arose how were we to make the remainder of the journey. The nearer that we came to home, the less patiently could we endure delays. Western enterprise, however, appeared to always rise equal to the occasion. When we expressed a desire to go farther up the river, we were informed that there was a boat at the landing by means of which we could reach Hastings. From there we expected to go to St. Paul in Captian [William F.] Davidson's boat.13

Two men who had seen in the stoppage of travelers at Red Wing a want to be supplied, had dug out of the mud of the river bank a boat abandoned as useless the year before. Never was a crazier craft brought out to solicit passenger traffic. The machinery which was in the body of the boat, was evidenced by a cloud of black smoke that poured out of a rusty, broken stack and steam, escaping with a hissing sound from somewhere below, which oozed out through the cracks between the boards. Above this hulk was a sort of box scarcely high enough for one to stand erect and with space for ten or twelve persons. There were no frames in the holes made for windows and the door, too small for the sill, could not be kept closed. A few store boxes for seats, candles stuck in wooden sockets nailed on the wall, and a round sheet iron stove constituted the furnishing of the cabin. An inspector of steamboats would have condemned the craft upon sight.

"Is our boat safe," I asked one of the men. "I guess so," he replied, "we are willing to make the trial if you are." My husband, who knew as little about machinery as a man could, was sent to inspect the engine. He came back and reported that "everything is all right." At 8 o'clock at night, the boat floated groaning out into the current and then headed northward. The gearing creaked at every revolution of the wheel and the timbers of the boat moaned as if in remonstrance at being pushed back into service after retirement on account of age. We expected every minute to be blown up

13 Davidson's boat, the "Frank Steele," was a small side-wheeler used in the Minnesota River trade in 1857. Merrick, Old Times on the Upper Mississippi, 269.
and were speculating as to the depth of the water and what were our chances of being rescued when the catastrophe took place. A cold wind whistled through the windows and open door; the stove, fired to a red hot heat, burnt one side of the body and an icy draft chilled the other. The boat puffed on through the darkness often almost washed back by the force of the swift current or quivered by colliding with blocks of ice. Two o’clock in the morning we breathed a sigh of relief as we stepped on the landing place at Hastings. Here was another disappointment; there was no boat to take us farther up the river. The ice had not yet broken above Hastings and Captain Davidson had not been able to make his first trip down.14

A long climb up a muddy road brought us to a hotel on the bluff. To our inquiry for lodging, the landlord opened the door of the parlor and there we saw lying upon chairs, sofas and upon the floor most of the late arrivals at the hotel. The obliging host, however, said that if we would wait for an hour, he would give us a room. We waited and were shown into a little room which had evidently just been vacated. The sheets were still warm from the former occupant of the bed; we changed the clothing and slept there the remainder of the night. A member of our party said that he was well acquainted with the town and thought that he could promise us the luxury of fresh eggs for breakfast. In the morning he spent some time in the search, but came back to the hotel and said that, “such a thing as an egg is not to be found in Hastings.”

As it was impossible to reach St. Paul by boat there remained but one thing, to go by wagon across the country. We started in a farm wagon at 7 o’clock in the morning, the road at first following the course of the river and then cutting across the prairie direct towards St. Paul. Half way we stopped for rest and refreshment at the home of a settler. The man had squatted down in this place years before and taken as a wife a good looking Indian woman, the child of this marriage was a wonderfully beautiful girl. What was the fate of this prairie beauty I have often wondered. As the first visitors at the house since Autumn, we were given a very cordial reception. The farmer manifested a great interest in the events that had taken place in the world, and inquired regarding issues and topics that were attracting the notice of the people when snow and winter weather had imprisoned him within the narrow limits of his farm six months before.

We reached St. Paul in the evening; and never did the town look so lovely as on that day; for now it had become home, a haven of rest after a journey of hardships.

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14 Navigation did not open until May 1 in 1857—an unusually late date. Russell Blakeley, "The Mississippi River and the Advent of Commerce in Minnesota," in Minnesota Historical Collections, 8:413.