

# Immigrants Trying Experiences

By N. TJERNAGEL.

## THE OCEAN VOYAGE

Stirring were the experiences, in the year 1851, of a party of immigrants from the district of Sveen, Norway, as they sailed, rode or walked, on their eventful trip to the West. Their ocean voyage by sailship lasted seven weeks. Such voyages would vary from six to eleven weeks, all depending on the ship and weather. On those early sailing ships it was usually the custom among the passengers to take provisions of their own with them in sufficient quantity to last throughout the voyage. There were stoves on board, but as these were few in proportion to the number of passengers, there was usually much rivalry when all were intent on preparing their meals at the same time. However, during stormy weather the competition was less keen; to many even the aroma of food was unbearable. We recall that our good neighbor Haakon Ingebrigtsen spoke of having been laid low by seasickness when he came across, and no proposal could ever be made attractive enough to induce him to make a return trip.

Sanitation was far from admirable on board ship, especially during stormy weather; and when it happened that epidemics set in, there was much lack of care and comfort for the stricken ones. How uncommonly sad the deaths at sea—and the dismal burials!

## OVERLAND THROUGH WILDERNESS

Arrived at New York, the party boarded a small steamer which left them at Albany. A canalboat carried them to Buffalo, and a steamboat to Green Bay, Wisconsin. A river steamer transported them up the Winnebago river in the direction of Waupaca, but on account of driftlogs hindering the steamer from reaching the usual landing-place, the passengers and their belongings were put ashore on the river bank. They were thus left stranded in the wil-

derness, unfamiliar with the language of the country. Scouting about they discovered a Frenchman and his two squaws in a miserable hut on a nearby hill top, but knowing neither English or Norwegian, he was incapable of giving them direction or guidance.

An acquaintance from Sveen, Norway, Michael Lie, had settled in these parts earlier, and a delegation of three now set out to locate him. Peder Tjernagel, called "Store Per" (Big Pete) because of his size and unusual strength, was given charge of the camp.

#### INDIAN VISITS

Abandoned thus in the wilds, the forlorn company's concern over the situation was tense, and it did not lessen when at night a large band of Indians in war regalia landed from their canoes and quietly surrounded the camp. The Indians seemed greatly puzzled as to the advent of these strange palefaces in their haunts, scrutinizing them closely, however, without molesting them. There was uneasiness in camp, but Peder, their leader, remained calm and kindly-mannered as always; and as the braves edged near he bethought himself of his violin upon which he forthwith played a few simple melodies. Some of the women begged him to cease playing, as they feared that the Indians might think he sought to cast an evil spell upon them.

But the music appeared to have a soothing effect, the tenseness of spirit relaxed, and soon the emblazoned warriors set to work to build fires; whereupon they fetched the carcass of a deer and roasted its meat impaled on the ends of stout sticks. The delicious odor from the roasted venison was most tempting to other than Indian nostrils, but none in our company dared ask for a helping.

After their meal the uncommunicative visitors left for the night, only to reappear the next evening. They regarded everything keenly, but spoke no word. Peder poured his soul into another friendship offering of music, which must have pleased and pacified them for they quietly dispersed, this time not to return. The forest zephyrs seemed to bespeak a psalm of praise and thankfulness to the devoted listeners for their deliverance.

## SCANT SUBSISTENCE

The lonely band lived on stale cod fish and a few dry crusts of bread for three days, when, finally, the delegation of three returned, each with an ox team, and accompanied by Lie with a similar team of his own. All set out promptly for Waupaca, their immediate destination, where they found lodgment in an abandoned lumberman's shanty. A sack of flour was obtained and dumplings of simple ingredients prepared; but the food proved hard to digest, the cause being largely that of their not being used to the highly-refined flour in use here. Several fell sick, among them Peder, who suffered greatly. Nor could they stomach the rank bacon, that after much effort they unfortunately, as it proved, were finally able to secure. What pluck and fortitude to be able to carry on under such circumstances.

Leaving Waupaca and the hired ox teams, they trudged on in the wake of Michael Lie's outfit. Lie was obliged to leave them for a short period some distance from the city, and here they made camp awaiting his return. They slept in the open, or under a thatch of coarse wisps of hay supported by fence rails. The thick Norwegian blankets called "aakla" were handy for coverings. When it rained and the drip, drip, from the makeshift roof grew unbearable, some of the young men sought to shake off the monotony and discomfort somewhat by varying it with lively sprinting back and forth in the open, rain or no rain.

## TOUGH GOING

But this manner of existence was well nigh unendurable and could not last, and it was no wonder that the opportune return of Lie was hailed with relief. He brought a load of market shingles to be taken to Koshkonong, their destination 130 miles distant. The members of the party shouldered what remained of personal effects that Michael couldn't haul, and trailed along on foot after him. Peder made use of his great muscular strength by carrying a mammoth burden. And he denied himself the comfort of any footwear in order to save shoe-leather. Imagine the idea of exposing a pair of naked feet on the variable terrain met with on a jaunt like this!

The intrepid wanderers rested at night on their "aakla" in favored spots of grass. Little food was obtainable, but milk was fortunately to be had from a few settlers on the way, nearly all of whom were glad to lend a helping hand. Only in very few exceptions was it apparent that greed and selfishness had already begun to take root in the virgin territory. One woman, in withering spite, threw on the ground the milk asked for when she heard the travelers couldn't afford to pay her price. An outwardly pious family advertised their kind of Christianity by charging double price for some easily-spared milk on hand.

#### INDIVIDUAL DESTINATIONS

After a week of travel the resolute band arrived safely, though sore of foot and with blistered back, Koshkonong, Wisconsin, being their erstwhile goal. Here they were given a chance to rest up among settlers of their own nationality. From this point the various members of the party chose their own directions; Peder, for one, going with his family to the Fox river settlement in Illinois, where a cousin had previously located. In 1858 he moved to Scott township, Hamilton county, Iowa, locating five miles northeast of Story City, where also, in 1859, came his brother, Ole Andreas Tjernagel, my father, who acquired a tract of land one and one half miles further west, the present Follinglo farm.

Bidding goodbye to those who remained of their party at Koshkonong, Endre Tjernagel and his brother Jokum, Peder's cousins, set out for Milwaukee. They spotted a man as a possible guide who was taking a load of wheat to this distant market; but not a lift did he offer them. They were left to depend on their own legs, and were allowed to keep him in sight as long as they could. For reasons unknown he gave them the slip. This caused them to pause in their journey so as to work a whole day for one good meal.

Both being of sizable proportions their stomachs accommodated much, but as their digestive capacities were truly good, they soon found themselves as hungry as before. In sampling some apples found under the trees in an orchard by the roadside, they had scarcely had a bite before some

watchdogs had bitten them. They left without delay, but though famished, kept strictly to the road the rest of the way.

Their depleted purse contained yet enough to enable them to find lodgment of a sort in the city, but the place proved uninviting enough. Imagine their consternation when rising from bed the next morning to find two dead from cholera in their very sleeping quarters. Fortunately they escaped this dreaded disease, which was then raging in the city. Jokum accepted service at once on a lake vessel as first mate. Eventually he became a ship-owner himself and an influential citizen of Milwaukee. Endre took hire on the same boat as Jokum as a common sailor, plied the lakes on various craft later, drifted finally to Chicago, and from there made his way to the Fox river settlement in Illinois.

#### MOVING TO IOWA

In the year 1858 Endre left Illinois for Iowa, in a large company of immigrants bound for Story and Hamilton counties. It rained much during their period of travel and they had difficulty in fording swollen streams and in crossing poorly-built bridges. They used oxen as their motive power on a trip that lasted three weeks.

In this connection, an episode comes to mind concerning a happening on a Mississippi ferry boat, as Peder Tjernagel and his family and twelve other families came West in covered wagons from Illinois. They crossed in a body at Davenport on a large ferry carrying passengers, wagons and teams, also their cattle. When nearly over, a cow grew restless, became unmanageable and leaped overboard. For her rescue some suggested a rope-and-tackle contrivance, others boats and hooks, and so on. While they were lost in uneasy consultation about the matter, Peder acted quietly and effectively by reaching out and catching the bewildered creature by the horns and, bracing himself, drew her bodily from the water onto the ferry. He said nothing, nor did the astounded lookers-on. So much for unusual strength, combined with calm judgment.

## THE INDIANS AT TAMA

Endre relates that when his party neared the Indian reservation near Tama, Iowa, they were joined by three grocery haulers, who had four oxen with two bulls leading on each wagon. In the evening Endre, the grocery men and others, crossed the river to explore the Indian domiciles there. As they entered the timber, they were met by some ferocious Indian dogs that sent them all skurrying with the exception of the oldest and more experienced grocery peddler, who braved the canines and soon whistled for the timid ones to return.

Upon reassembling they met some Indian braves, who showed friendship by escorting them into the deep timber, where was being held a dance and pow-wow. The visitors were invited to seat themselves on straw mats and witness the performances; but immediately upon their accepting the invitation one of the dancers snatched away Endre's hat—and Endre saw himself going bare-headed the rest of the journey. His companions laughed, but Endre's turn came when the circling dancers also dexterously nipped away the hats of the others. The performers made a feint as if to conceal the accumulated headgear, but suddenly made proper replacement both deftly and gracefully.

While watching the Indians in their dancing contortions, the head grocer suddenly divested himself of his hampering garb, jumped into the swaying circle and joined in the gaieties. This gave great glee to the regular entertainers, the squaws especially. He took one of the latter on each arm, whirled them around, hoisted himself to their shoulders and performed many other antics for their pleasure. Suddenly a stentorian voice boomed through the night, whereupon silence fell; and quietly as a whisper the throng faded away into the forest, leaving our party bewildered and alone. The call of the chief had ended the merriment for the night.

## ON THE WARPATH

On a Sunday afternoon in the long ago as Endre, who lived a mile and a half northwest of his cousin Peder, was

reading a religious discourse before his assembled household, his aged mother suddenly interrupted him with the exclamation: "Look at all the cattle!" But her vision was at fault and instead of cattle three files of redskins, advancing in regular Indian fashion were approaching, the center file seemingly heading straight for the house. A few braves mounted on ponies rode back and forth between the lines to exercise a certain discipline and to communicate orders. Naturally our friends grew alarmed and, hoping to escape the oncoming hordes, hurriedly left in the direction of the home of Peder, Endre taking in his arms one child and his wife's brother, a soldier, carrying the other.

A Mr. Keefe, who lived on the pioneer place later occupied by Rasmus Eide, met them on the way and bade them be of good cheer, as he did not think the warriors would molest them while on the march. They kept filing by at intervals till sundown, when we may presume that they made camp. The narrator said it was an unforgettable sight, as he viewed the multi-colored war pageant of the prairie, winding in and out among the hills as far as the eye could reach. He judged that there were hundreds of paint-bedaubed, feather-bedecked braves in the vast company.

A few belated youthful stragglers brought up the rear—and were crying! It seemed strange to Mr. Keefe and the others that an Indian warrior should so forget himself as to shed tears, and sought to learn the reason. But no word of explanation was vouchsafed them. Evidently the rigors of the warpath had been too much for the youngsters, and they were downcast from fatigue and from fear that they might miss the glory of personal participation in the anticipated fray.

A friend of Endre was one of the unfortunate victims of the Spirit Lake tragedy. The family had been warned of the impending danger, but had tarried in their home, disliking to leave. The consequence was that when the warring hordes came upon them there was bloodshed, the husband being killed near their dwelling, while the wife was seized and stripped, and forced to witness the slaugh-

ter of her baby. She expected to meet a similar fate, but fortunately found an opportunity during the onslaught to conceal herself in the tall grass and escaped. Thus were innocent, well-intentioned settlers made victims of the smouldering Indian hate harking back to real or fancied grievances against usurpations of their early domains in the long ago, although every acre of Iowa land owned by Indians had been purchased from them under agreed terms of treaties with the government.

---

## Patriotism Plus Wisdom

Gov. Leslie M. Shaw: Recent years have demonstrated the abiding patriotism of the American people and their faith in the ever-increasing greatness of America. Few there be who would not gladly die for their country. The only thing they are not willing to do is to think, and then hold their conduct in obedience to their judgment. The future of our blessed land rests with those who can think, who will think, who can and will grasp a major premise, a minor premise, and drawing a conclusion therefrom, never desert it.

It has become painfully commonplace to say that the American people can be trusted. While their good intentions can be relied upon, no nation will long exist on good intentions. The nations that have gone from the map have perished in spite of good intentions. The future of America rests not in the purity of motives, nor upon the intelligence, but in the wisdom of its citizens. In the realm of statecraft some of the most dangerous characters in history have been intelligent, pious souls, and some of the safest and wisest have been unlearned.

---

## Forward Looking

Gov. George W. Clarke: We are not worth our time and space here unless we are looking constantly forward to the coming of a better day.—From the Second Inaugural Address, 1915.



Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa 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. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.