

## TRAVELING TO THE MIDDLE WEST IN 1838

---

Dr. Henry B. Young of Burlington, Iowa, for over fifty years a practicing physician, lately presented to the Historical Department a copy of a diary his father, Dr. John A. Young, wrote during a trip he made from Chillicothe, Ohio, to Monmouth, Illinois, where he established a medical practice which he successfully conducted for thirty-five years. Dr. John A. Young was born in Chillicothe February 1, 1812, and was the only child of William and Mary McKnight Young. The father owned a tanyard and the son in due time mastered the tanner's trade, then went to Philadelphia where he spent a year in converting tanned hides into commercial leather. In those days that was all done by hand, and was a real art. Having finished acquiring the trade he returned home and in 1836 visited a maternal uncle in Xenia, Ohio. This uncle, wealthy and childless, offered to bear the expense of a medical education for the young man if he would abandon his plans for a business career. After due consideration he did so and in 1838 he was graduated from Miami Medical College at Cincinnati. In the fall of that year he began his journey to Monmouth as the following diary relates.

Sunday Evening, Dec. 4th, 1838. Started from Ceasars Creek for Monmouth, Ill. Was detained at the bridge until the 5th at 2 P. M. Took an outside seat . . . to Cin<sup>1</sup> there being 9 inside. Had . . . hero along who was continually dunning the people for clocks which he said they had purchased of him. Cold night. Arrived in Cin at 6 A. M. Saw Dr. Perkins Heard part of a lecture by Prof. Drake. Saw Rives McDowell. Took passage in great haste on board the Dolphin for St. Louis. Got aground in backing out at 1 o'clock and stuck till morning. A young lady aboard resembling Miss Beth A. French. Dr. De Chine strange genius. Big start off again at 9 A. M. 7th. 8th 4 P M stuck again on a . . . just below Warsaw. —passed us on the way up and the Swiftsure down.

### Page 2

Our boat appears to be too large drawing too much water. I am sorry I had not taken a smaller boat to Louisville and then another down, but fortune is against me on this trip. (8 P. M. Cloudy and dark, slight falling of snow) The day has been generally clear and fair, but cold.

---

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Young's style of abbreviations, punctuation, etc., is followed.—Editor.

Wrote to my father and M. Thompson enclosing to the latter a letter from I. Wills of Chil— Have not become acquainted with the ladies yet. Saturday. Lay all last night on the bar. The steamer Thames coming up pulled us off. The Empire was also fast. 9 o'clock Taking in the loading which we put out last night. Cold and clear with a slight skiff of snow on the ground Fast again at 12 M. near Vevay.

## Page 3

Stayed about one hour. Past Madison 4 P. M. Fine looking little town from the river, stopt but did not land. Past Hanover. We had a strong head wind all day nothing large moves considering the stage of the water wind ceased and making fine headway. Had a confab with the ladies pretty fine ones I think. The single one not only looks speaks like Miss Bell. Is quite lively and is also a *Corncracker* living about 20 miles from Lexington. Her name I have not yet learned. Sent Mr. Thompson's letter ashore by Mr. Armstrong to be mailed. The young lady's name above alluded to is Mary Ellis. Put ashore about 29 miles below Madison fearing to run in the night. Sunday morning. See entirely across the river at this place although there was no appearance of it in the evening—very cold.

## Page 4

Off at 8 after running about an hour descried the Savannah aground on what is called the "Grass flats" 18 miles above Louisville. Here the Captain refused to poreded any further and put in for winter quarters or a rise of water. Fortunately there was a small trading boat lying near, this was engaged to carry us down to Louis— It had no name and we called it the "Chicken thief." Fine time with the ladies as we were all huddled together— Landed at 2 P. M. Here I was detained 3 days waiting for another boat. Fine town visited the "Medical Institute" Heard Cott— Cooke and Caldwell. Cooke is a perfect drone. Caldwell not so good as I had expected. The edifice will be fine when finished. Visited Virgil McKnight and left my trunk and box in his care to be forwarded to St. Louis. Visited the Theatre, saw Booth as Cassius in Julius Ceasar, good performance. Theatre but small. Saw Booth the following evening in Richard—

## Page 5

Wednesday. Took passage back to Cin where I arrived on Thursday at 6. A. M. Saw Dr. P., again Heard Harrison & McDowell. In the afternoon took passage home in the stage. Arrived there safely on the following morning just before daylight and surprised them all as they supposed me in the Miss. Remained there until the next Tuesday afternoon when I mounted "Tom" to take it by land. That evening went to Dayton Miss F. M. G. and D. were both there. Called in company with I. Hean to see but found the house deserted. Called again alone about 8 P. M.

## Page 6

They are still absent. Left my *card* on the table and left early next

morning without seeing them. *Rather it had been otherwise.* Wednesday—Very cold. Went as far as Eaton only on account of having to roughen my horse. Arrived in Indianapolis on Saturday at noon. Nothing doing here smoking cigars and talking some state politics. The Legislature had adjourned for the holidays like other *boys*. Left Ind— Sunday 23d noon and rode to Brownsburgh 15 miles. very cold Next day went to Crawfordsville. This is quite a fine little town. Tuesday 25th Arrived at Independence. Nothing doing here worth note Friday. Went out to the “*Grand Prairie*” to hunt Chickens Got two and two “fox squirrels” Sunday we had a Methodist quarterly meeting.

## Page 7

Wednesday Jan 2nd 1839. Started west and went as far as Danville Ill The weather so far has been quite mild.

Thursday 3rd Only made 25 miles to Sidney Could have gone some farther before night But was compelled to stay there or ride 13 miles farther it being that distance to the next house. Slim looking chance here for either man or horse. The town is composed of 3 or 4 houses just in the point of a small grove Fared tolerably well however considering all things. Landlord a Kentuckian. Two physicians were there. Hard cases. Friday 4th Passed through *Urbana* county seat of *Champaign*—Poor place—Perhaps a dozen houses.—Stayed all night at Mount pleasant. Hard looking chance—Three or four houses Fared tolerably well Landlord a Virginian. Saturday 5th Passed through Le Roy

## Page 8

Arrived at Bloomington about 2 P. M. Pretty fine looking little town Saw Haines. he *blowed* considerably about the Ladies. Said he was corresponding with a Lady in Xenia but mentioned no names. Stayed there till Sunday 10 A. M. Sunday 6th Travelled 21 miles to Mackinaw—Stayed all night with an English man Good stabling but the dirtiest kind of eating myself. Monday 7th Started for Peoria distant 20 miles Crossed the last of the *Grand Prairie* which I have been traversing ever since leaving Danville. From this last place to Sidney I had 5 or 6 miles prairie. From Sidney to Urbana 12 miles all prairie and not a house. From here to Robinsons 12 miles the same. From thence to Mount pleasant 13 miles the same. From thence to Le Roy 10 miles the same—From thence to

## Page 9

Bloomington 15 miles the same. At each of these places there is Groves but the road does not in any case pass through them more than from one to three miles. The timber in these groves is tolerable good consisting of white oak black oak, hickory, some cherry, ash, etc. Arrived in Peoria 12½ and fed Fine looking place Considerable *Lake* opposite the town Went 16 m— farther to Franklin prairie and stayed all night with a Yankee.

Tuesday 8th Passed through several small prairies of from 2 to 5 miles in width and stopped in Knoxville for the night. Fine looking

little town Saw there a "New Light Yankee" one of the "Thousand and one Society" men a "Grahamite" to the hub Had some argument with him whether man was a *carnivorous* animal

Page 10

Wednesday 9th Arrived at Monmouth

It is uncertain just when the young doctor began his practice, curiously enough his journal being silent on that subject. His trunk and box were still in storage in Louisville. Undated and in the back of this old diary or memorandum book is the following announcement: "Dr. John A. Young respectfully tenders his professional services to the citizens of Monmouth and vicinity. His office is in the drug store of McCallan & Bruce, where he may at all times be found, except when professionally employed." It is supposed that he was in great need of supplies, because ten weeks after his arrival he makes a trip to St. Louis making a record of it in the journal as follows:

March 26th 1839 Started from Monmouth for St. Louis. Arrived at Oquawka or the Yellow Bank at noon distant 18 miles. All prairie excepting one point of a grove until we came upon the river timber which in this place is about three miles in extent. The *Yellow Banks* are so called from a reddish yellow clay and a yellow sand which compose the bluffs The whole country as far back as the timber extends is quite sandy; in the town it drifts about like snow getting into everything. Spent the afternoon in lounging about the bank looking for a boat. The wind is high and the river quite rough.

Page 11

There are about ten or fifteen Indians encamped on the opposite shore. They are of the Winnebago tribe. Four of them in attempting to cross in a canoe were upset about the middle of the river. Their comrades however hastened to their rescue and took in three, the fourth clung to the canoe and floated down about a quarter of a mile before he was taken out. They then went above town and set fire to the woods to dry themselves. Rather a dirty greasy set. Were very anxious to get more whiskey but could not get any. Had quite a young Papoose put up in a new style to me but one that I believe is quite common. It is similar to the plates in the *Family Magazine*.

Page 12

This night all being very sleepy we let a boat pass down before we could get out to hail it Wednesday 27th A very fine day and quite warm. After breakfast we took a walk up the river and saw the indians break up their camp and start. They are on their return home from a

visit up the Missouri where they went last fall to hunt. There is five canoe loads. Saw the remains of several lodges and one *grave*. Went down on the beach and looked for carnelians as they are quite plenty—found one or two quite fine ones This day very warm—Steamer Gypsy passed up. Saw plenty of *Musquitoes*. There being five or six of us by this time waiting for a passage we took turns watching. No boat however came down.

## Page 13

This day two Indians came over in a canoe with some turkies ducks and fur to sell They were Saucks and were from Keokuks camp which they said was about two miles below. One of them is a Fine looking old man called Parmaho. He was taken with Black Hawk. Cunning old fellow in a trade.

Thursday 28th Cloudy and raining. Two more Indians and a boy came over I asked them if they were *Saucks* they shook thier heads and answered *Kowakie Fox* About 12 M the Brazil (?) came down with two Keels in tow loaded with lead ore and boat full of passengers. We all got passes however but no berths.

## Page 14

All hands up at daylight and got under way. Weather fair and more moderate. When we arrived at the head of the rapids all the passengers were put aboard the two *Keels* so as to make the boat as light as possible. All passed over safely. The rapids were about 12 miles in extent and the channel quite crooked. Got on board again at *Keokuk*. This town was once the residence of the *great Civil chief*. Saw a number of indians here, Landed a short time at Warsaw opposite the mouth of the *Des Moines*. a great part of Fort Des Moines is still standing. It is on the Ill. side The Des Moines is the boundary line between Missouri and Iowa.

## Page 15

We now have Missouri on our right and Ills on our left. The country on either side has been generally flat and subject to inundation. At noon we stopped at Quincy. We made quite a "*grand entree*" The Steward and one or two others performed on the Clarinet and bass horn and attracted quite a crowd. Quincy is situated on a very high bluff which is cut into a great many deep ravines. Notwithstanding all this however it is quite a beautiful place and speaks well for the spirit of the citizens as it requires an immense labour to grade thier streets and level the lot

## Page 16

As is my custom when I have time I ran over the whole town They have quite a large and splendid hotel here one that would be an honour to a city. They also have a fine court house. Here I saw ten or twelve wagon loads of Mormons crossing the river from MO. I was told that from ten to twenty wagons had crossed daily for the last two weeks. I believe they have all agreed to leave Mo. and seek a home somewhere else. Those that I saw said they did not know where they should go.

There is nothing remarkable in their appearance in any way either in dress or looks. In this I was disappointed.

Here we unloaded one of our Keels and left it. Got under way about 4 P. M. Got a few *apples* the first I have seen since leaving home.

Page 17

About dark we passed Marion City on the Mo. side. This is the town that was laid out by the Rev. Ely of Phila. and where he has a college. Poor looking place and will never be anything else as half the town and more is sometimes under water.

Landed again at Hannibal 12 or 14 miles below M. It looked quite picturesque and fine by moonlight whilst our small band played up some fine tunes. Soon got under weigh again and I retired to the cabin. Sunday 31st. Last night verified the old adage "better to be born lucky than to be born rich" as by some chance unknown to me I got a *berth*. Whilst many who were worth thousands lay on the floor. some had left at Quincy and the clerk in mistake put me down to the vacancy although there were others who had prior claims. I however said nothing but "turned in" and had a good nights rest. Last night we left our other *Keel* at Louisiana and we now "go ahead" finely.

Page 18

About 9 A M passed the mouth of the Illinois. That side has now become quite a bluff with tremendous rocks frowning like the battlements of some old castle. The river all the way down has been very full of islands and "Towheads" but here I think they become larger. Landed a few minutes at Alton. This is another fine town and also on a bluff bank. The state Penitentiary is here. Not a very good one I should think.

Page 19

About 1 passed the mouth of the Missouri The water of this river has a singular reddish yellow appearance and the line can plainly be seen for miles down on the MO. side after some distance the whole Miss— assumes that appearance slightly, At 2 passed the wreck of steamer which was sunk last fall. They were engaged in raising her freight with a "diving bell." This is the first I have ever seen and we passed this at such a distance and such a rate that I could see but little of it. About 3½ we rounded to at the great city of St. Louis and in a few minutes I went on land to hunt lodgings and look for M. T. Lind.

Page 20

In my perambulations I passed the Catholic Cathedral and finding the door open and the priests at the altar I passed in. This is a splendid edifice and is richly furnished in the interior. I think it quite as fine as St. Johns in Phila. perhaps finer. I remained until service was ended and the people had generally retired when I took a more particular survey of the place. There are some fine paintings. Went to the City Hotel and found it kept by Laysham formerly of Dayton, O. one of the bar keepers from Circleville by the name of Boyer and the other one of Colts

old bar keepers. Finding myself among Buckeyes I took lodging here. Arrived at Mon— Friday night April 12th.

Here the diary ends. Further knowledge of this St. Louis trip is gained from the expense account, set down in detail: Total cash on starting, \$94.43 $\frac{3}{4}$  [notice the  $\frac{3}{4}$  cents]; fare to Oquawka [stage], \$1.00; fare to St. Louis, \$10.00; shaving twice and hair cut, 50 cts.; beer, apples, 50 cts.; freight and cartage (trunk and box from Louisville), \$3.25; hat, \$6.00; books, \$7.50; wallet, 75 cts.; glass mortar \$1.12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; stethoscope, \$1.12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; 2 doz. handkerchiefs, \$1.50; pencil points, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  cts.; drugs, \$37.10; theater, \$2.25; mending watch, 50 cts.; bill at hotel, \$9.50; porter, 25 cts.

The memorandum book is then devoted to miscellaneous items. Under date of July 20, 1839, he credits a patron with 2 loads of wood, another with a load of wood and a load of rails. On August 30, 1843, one is credited with 2 doz. chickens, \$1.50. Another on November 1, 1850, turned in oats at 18 cents per bushel; another on November 22, 1850, 117 lbs. beef at 3 cts, \$3.51, and so it ran for several years, showing money was scarce but produce abundant, and indicating the struggle the pioneer small town and country doctor had to make for existence.

In the winter of 1840-41 Dr. Young spent some time at the Medical Institute in Louisville in post graduate work, and in the spring of 1841 married Miss Isabella Wallace of Xenia, Ohio, and brought her to Monmouth where they raised their family and where he had a successful practice extending over a third of a century.

---

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.