



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Of father....

[s.l.]: [s.n.], [s.d.]

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/HI3PJIQ4BK4278X>

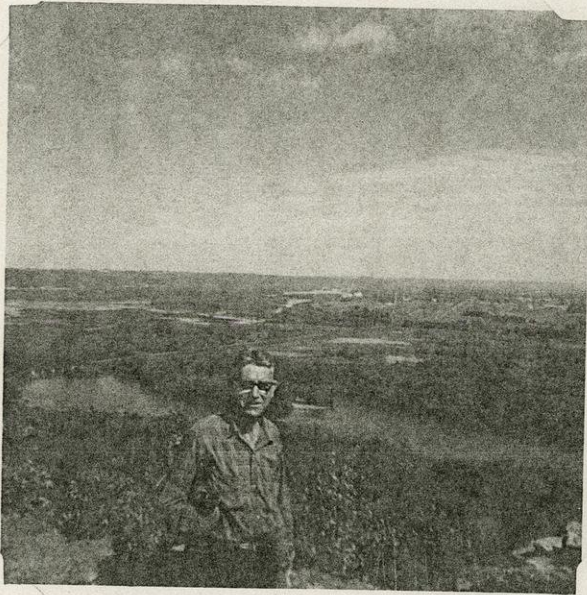
<http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0/>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

Of Father
 of waters
 Of sons
 and daughters
whose sons
 and daughters . . .

.



Wy-Al-uring

Upper Mississippi River vacation, July '63

We stopped at dad's childhood home where there'd been first a log house then a frame house, a stone's throw from the depot at Swan River, Minnesota. We stood and looked at the spot where the Millen place was supposed to be. No sign of habitation. A small clump of pines. Gone back to nature.

This is Al remembering:

My father had come from Ontario, Canada, worked here in northern Minnesota at lumbering and kept the Swan River farm going.

Oxen pulled the plow, of course, in the early years.

As a kid, I'd step outdoors with a piece of ma's fresh-baked bread - we used butter when we had it, otherwise lard - and our pet deer would be right there trying to get it away from me. She would hit me with her feet, they fight with their front feet, you know. We had a deer that would cry to come in out of the flies. Ma would then pull aside the mosquito netting from her bed to let the deer come in and lie down.

Our Billy, I remember, got sent to the Minneapolis zoo. On one of the deer we hung a Swiss bell so that as the animal wandered around the countryside we could keep some track of it. One time we traced the sound of this bell to a farmer's cow. The farmer confessed he'd shot the deer and buried it - it had been eating in his garden. He transferred the bell to the cow. We were in an uproar over all this and put flowers on the deer's grave.

We were given a poor, starved dog, part collie with a collie face. Ma said, "He's a walking graveyard." We kept the sound if not the meaning and called him Gravy.

Once a railroad man tied corn to a fishline and when our Plymouth Rock bit it the man hauled it in. Ma ran after the train because she prized all our chickens but she failed to catch up with it.

No doctor within twenty miles. He would come by train from Grand Rapids if notified of a sickness. When brother Bob and I, still kids, lay with pneumonia, the doctor came twice, met each time at Swan River by our father.

We trapped. I recall trapping a big mink - number 1 dark northern, got \$10 for the hide. We caught bob cats in our traps and one time a Canada lynx. I was terrified of the lynx, those fierce glaring eyes and those whiskers that spread way out from the face. I'd never seen such an animal. I took out for home to get pa to help me get it out of the trap. We were given \$7.50 for the hide. It was exciting for us children just to see and identify the different animal tracks in the snow.

I can remember pine stumps around here that measured six feet across.

We kids used to gather wild roses - what large wild roses grew everywhere here - as bouquets for ma. Sometimes we ate wild rose buds - very good, a mild flavor. We also picked lady slippers for ma.

Chokecherries so flat-tasting we mixed with pieplant. This made a very good dish of sauce.

Where the logs crossed at the corners of the house we laid dry onions - these were bought at the store, not raised by us - and after these onions froze we ate them as you would apples -

the strong taste went out of them by freezing.

One evening when I was around eight or nine years old I went for the cows and got lost. Darkness came on and I was scared. I picked up a couple of empty whisky bottles to battle bears or whatever or just the shadows if I had to. They sent a posse out for me, found me and I thought: when I get home they'll beat my tail off. But no, nothing like it, they sat me down at the table and brought all sorts of food for my supper.

Our teachers at the school in Swan River were as well educated as one could expect in those times. One of them stands out for me, Esther Morris. I fell in love with her, of course, as many boys do with favorite women teachers. I was very much cut up when she married a man by name of Johnson. She was a high school graduate and she taught us all she knew including algebra and trigonometry. I was in this school in Swan River between the ages of eight and thirteen. This was my schooling. But Leonard Palmer who lived here, himself just a boy, introduced me to how much pleasure there is in reading.

At thirteen I started work - on railroad ties at the village. I was tall and strong and the work did not hurt me. Not much

juvenile delinquency when kids have quite a bit of work to do. Following that, I worked in a gravel pit at road construction. I walked two miles to get to it, worked ten hours a day there, and on returning home at night helped with the chores. And on Sundays pa would say, "Take the gun and see what you can bring home to eat."

We worked in the woods when it was 50 degrees below zero. At noon we'd build a fire to thaw out the frozen sandwiches.

We lived only a rabbit-jump from the Mississippi River. All that river and lake country lives in my blood.



Swan River, Minn.