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A.S.S.
O.W. Smith

A BRITISH VIEW OF WISCONSIN IN 1846

The editor of a collection of British travelers' writings on America has called the years 1825 to 1845 the period of Tory condescension.¹ It was during those years, he points out, that the comparatively comfortable journey by steamboat began to encourage men of the upper and professional classes to visit our shores in search of new sights and experiences. Improved facilities for inland travel invited many of these foreigners into the hinterland, where they discovered what seemed to them a deplorable intolerance of any form of authority or of class distinctions. Since these traits reminded the travelers of certain obnoxious reform movements in their own country, they sprang to the defense of old British institutions by the method of attacking American democracy.

The writer of this journal was one such typical traveler. James Drew was a Glasgow attorney of good family and considerable wealth. He and Mrs. Drew undertook the journey to Wisconsin as a rest cure for the latter and to renew acquaintance with relatives who had left Scotland and settled at Detroit and at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin Territory. His observations, he tells us in his opening sentence, are based on a seven months' residence in Wisconsin. He concluded that the

1. Allan Nevins, American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers (New York, 1923), 111-13.

Microfilm

James Drew Journal

region offered remarkably fine advantages to prospective settlers and noted down costs of opening up a farm as furnished by Walworth County pioneers. But although Drew admired the country "agriculturally viewed," he disliked its inhabitants, whom he found to be "too greedy to be honest, too self sufficient to be religious, and too independent to take instruction." Many of his criticisms, such as those on the attitude towards law breaking, are valid. Unfortunately he failed to make any mention of the truly amazing fact that the region, which had been opened to settlement for only seven years, had in that short time organized schools, churches, and lecture courses, built roads, and secured a stage route and mail deliveries.

The Drews arrived in New York City on July 14, 1845, after a six weeks' voyage on a packet boat from Glasgow, and traveled leisurely by rail and steamer to Kenosha. A thirty-seven mile stagecoach journey brought them on September 5 to the village of Geneva. There they established themselves for the winter in a rented cottage with a milch cow, their Scottish servant, an abundance of books, and a piano. The village, situated on the eastern end of Lake Geneva, had a population of about five hundred, with several well-stocked stores, a weekly post, and a Presbyterian church. Ten miles distant, at the western end of the lake, was the home of Drew's sister, Mrs. William Reid.

The journal kept by James Drew on this trip is owned by the New-York Historical Society and these excerpts concerning Wisconsin are reproduced by the (kind) permission of that so-

ciety. The journal is a retrospect of experiences, rather than a day by day record. Two of the Reid daughters, Mrs. Nathaniel S. Donaldson, wife of a Milwaukee merchant, and Mrs. George Manierre, wife of a Chicago attorney, are mentioned in the journal. Recollections written by the latter's son regarding his childhood visits to Lake Geneva were published in volume one of the Wisconsin Magazine of History, and illustrated by a water color sketch of the Reid home that was made by Mrs. Drew on this visit.

22 April, 1846

I now write after having been upwards of 7 months in this western territory, and after having had considerable opportunities for seeing the country, and knowing the people and their habits. I have walked a considerable distance in all directions around Geneva. I have visited Racine, 37 miles, and Milwaukee 56 miles to the east, and other distant towns to the west. I have gone over prairies & cultivated fields, oak openings and heavy timber land, and thus I have had opportunities for seeing this new country both in its natural and progressive state.

Wisconsin Territory is more extensive than any of the states of the union, and comprehends a much larger area than England & Scotland put together.² So far as I have seen there is

2. Wisconsin Territory extended to the Mississippi River and included the present northeastern Minnesota. Its area was 83,065 square miles, thus making it larger than any of the eastern states and slightly larger than England and Scotland.

little, if any, unimprovable land. It has a gently rolling undulating surface, interspersed with heavy timber land, oak openings & prairies. The heavy timber is chiefly along the Lake Shore, the interior of the country having the oak openings & prairies. The native American does not fear the heavy timber. Accustomed to the use of the axe he rather prefers it, having thus abundance of wood for his fencing rails. But the oak openings and the prairies are better adapted for the Emigrant Foreigner, as the former has just enough of wood for rails, and the latter is immediately ready either for stock raising or general cropping.

Not more than 10 years ago the whole territory was in the hands of the Pottowatomie Tribe of Indians. ³ Having surrendered it to the American Government by Sale at something between one and two cents an acre (these Sales having been generally imposed on the poor Indians) the first Govern^{ment} Land Sales took place at Milwaukee in February 1839, and at that sale the greatest portion of the South part of the Territory was taken up at the Government price of 1 1-4 Dollars per acre. A large agricultural population from New York State was at that time, and has ever since been pouring into the territory, and the southern portion has thus become well settled. At the public sales in 1839 great tracks ~~land~~ were bought up by speculating capitalists which has since proved injurious to the general improvement of the country, for these pashas long held their land expecting a future profit, and thus great portions of the territory even now continue

3. The Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa Indians sold their claims to the lands in southeastern Wisconsin at the treaty held at Chicago in September, 1833.

in its natural state.

The consequence however now is that these capitalists are selling at from 3 to 5 Dollars, nothing more than their cost with interest and taxes, as the new Emigrants, rather than give a profit, have been going to the newly opened districts in the North West where Government Sales periodically take place, and are supplied at the first price. Any new Settlers in the South portion can get plenty of excellent land from the first holders at 3 Dollars, and with considerable improvements at 5 to 10. All kinds of crops which are raised in northern latitudes are here cultivated with success. Wisconsin has already the reputation of having the best wheat growing soil in the Union, and wheat forms the farmer's chief remunerative crop.

Agriculturally viewed Wisconsin Territory is much to be praised. The soil is rich, easily wrought, and any farmer with knowledge and industry may here soon make himself an independent Land Proprietor. The country is admirably adapted for Scotch farmers with a family having good hands and willing to apply themselves. Even without a capital, such a family could get on well, but emigrating with two or three hundred Pounds and having this as a free capital to commence with, the Father would be able to purchase a sufficiency of land and farm it, and on expiry of the first year make himself and his family independent.

The most intelligent and practical farmer in this neighbourhood, Mr. Goodsell,⁴ has assured me of this and has given

4. Charles M. Goodsell was a pioneer settler of Geneva, an organizer of an antislavery party there, and one of the founders of Beloit College. Western Historical Company, History of Walworth County, (Chicago, 1882), 861.

me the following example. The land has been laid off by Government in Sections of 640 Acres, and these are subdivided into lots of 320, 160, and 80 Acres. Take an 80 Acre lot as the example.

Dr. Original cost of land	100
fencing	150
first breaking or ploughing	160
Seed & Dragging or harrowing	160
Harvesting	90
Thrashing	<u>120</u>
	780

Cr. 80 Acres at the correct average will produce 20 Bushels per Acre, being 1600 Bushels, and at the lowest calculation will yield clear 50 cents per Bushel, being \$800

Deduct expenditure	<u>780</u>
Profit remaining	\$20

and this after having paid for the land and fencing.

The 2nd Year's crop will average 25 Bushels per Acre in all 2000 at 50 Cents, clear, yielding \$1000:

Deduct		
Ordinary ploughing	120	120
Seed & Dragging	160	
Harvesting	90	
Thrashing	<u>120</u>	<u>490</u>
Profit Second Year		510

Living is cheap which enables the Emigrant to get over the first & second year, with little family expenditure and by expiry of that period he has his own crops for support. He can buy oats for 25 cents, Indian corn 37 cents, & Potatoes for 15 cents per bushel. The best fresh beef is to be had for 3 cents per lb:

Farm Stock costs as under

A Good pair of Horses	150
Double Set Harness	20
A Good Walking pair of oxen	50
Milch cows each from 10 to	12
Horse Waggon or for oxen	60
Breaking Plough	25
Common Plough	10
Harrows	5

I mention these particulars that I may have them for reference and for the information of parties having thoughts of emigrating to this country.

Mr. Reid bought 1050 acres at the land sales of 1839 and he has been lately offering the best land at three dollars per acre without finding a purchaser. He had last year a 27 acre field in wheat, and a 24 acre field in green crop. He has informed me that from 50 to 70 bushels of oats per acre can be raised with good cultivation, and that great crops of Indian corn are also easily raised. Potatoes are produced in great quantities and of excellent quality. Sheep are being fast introduced into the country, and this stock promises well.

The great disadvantages with which a foreigner has to contend are 1st the difficulty of getting help or service, and next, the constant disposition which the American has to take advantage. Hired labour is expensive, & workmen are insolently independent and are with difficulty to be had. Ploughmen get from 10 to 12 dollars, and house helps from 4 to 5 dollars a month with board, and must seldom, if ever, be found fault with, unless the master is prepared for an instant change.

In his dealings or transactions ~~intrade~~, the American has no fixed price. His price is just as much as he can get, and to overreach & take advantage is laughed at -- boasted of -- & thought clever, instead of being reprobated as it is among a moral people. Every one will openly tell you that his neighbour, or such a one, is not to be believed in aught he may say while making a sale. I know much of all this experimentally. I have frequently given an American more than I knew he expected to get, frankly telling him my consciousness of this, and that my inducement was to get either a good article, or good service, as the case might be, but so far from producing the corresponding return, it produced additional greed, and any merit is awarded, not as liberality on the part of the giver, but to the American himself for clever management.

We fear that religion influences but a small portion in this Western Country, as all will admit that those who profess religion (that is church communicants) are alike anxious as others to overreach and take advantage, to cheat and to deceive. We

look upon the people as too greedy to be honest, too self sufficient to be religious, and too independent to take instruction. So jealous are they of their independence, and, in their own estimation, the personification of all that is great & good, that with my own ears I have heard the Congregational Minister of Milwaukee who is probably the most talented minister in the territory,⁵ make a prefatory apology from his own pulpit before enlarging on the general, and natural, depravity of the human heart.

The clergymen do not occupy that position of independence which is essential to the respectability and stature of their calling, and to enable them to control their people or their habits of life. Their situation is always held at the will of the people, their pay is very inadequate for respectability or independence, and even this has to be received in farm produce or provisions, thus producing dependence & familiarity, and levelling the distinctions which ought ever to exist between education and ignorance. As an illustration of their dependence, I may mention a recent fact that when our village Presbyterian clergyman⁶ was lately inducted he took occasion in his first ensuing discourse to enlarge upon the reciprocal duties of the Minister and the People. He urged the regular and punctual payment of their sub-

5. Drew probably refers to the Reverend A. L. Chapin, who was at that time pastor of the Presbyterian church at Milwaukee and in 1850 became the first president of Beloit College. Jubilee Memorial of the Congregational Convention of Wisconsin ([Madison, 1890]), 68.

6. The Reverend Homer H. Benson. Ibid., 56.

scription towards his maintenance, and he begged some relief from the oppressive habit of being requested to preach a sermon at each of the numerous funerals he had to attend. One of the Village Householders, a profane person and not communicating with any church, hearing of this remarked openly that the Minister wanted to preach only for those who could pay, and this coming to the Clergyman's ears he felt himself constrained to call upon this free citizen, and explained that there must be a mistake, that he meant no slight or distinction, and visited the Scoffer with an invitation to his study to hear the manuscript read over. We heard the sermon, which to us was quite unimpeachable.

On the Sunday previous to the Ordination we heard the same Clergyman ask instructions from the Congregation whether he was to convene the usual weekly prayer meeting, or dispense with it in consequence of the ordination. He dared not dictate or arrange this himself. The Presbyterian clergyman of the adjoining Station, who was our next Neighbour and a well educated man, wrought daily with his Horse & Cart, his wife telling us that his congregation do not give him adequate means for his support. These are just common illustrations.

The Schools are under the like subjection. Each locality elects its own Teacher, but allows him no control. He must do, and teach, just as he is allowed. The Scriptures or religious instruction is entirely forbid throughout the Week and is permitted only in the Sunday Schools. A most respectable young teacher came to this village in the early part of Winter. He was soon publicly reproached by a Parent for presuming to chastise

his Boys, and the man's family was at once withdrawn from the school.

The public school in Mr. Reid's district was also opened in the beginning of Winter. The boys of one of the neighbouring farmers had an inveterate habit of swearing. The remonstrances of the Teacher had no effect, & he chastised one of them. Next morning the parent came to the school and abused the teacher, in the course of which the latter had to defend himself, and blows were exchanged. The parent removed his boys and immediately brought an action of damages against the teacher for having whipped the boy. A jury was called, the school boys were called and examined upon oath, and the facts being thus elicited, the teacher was acquitted. The result to the neighbourhood has been to close the school, leaving the locality without a teacher throughout the greatest part of the Winter.

Politically viewing the Americans, there is little to please the Foreigner or with which an Englishman can sympathise. They are anti British on all their feelings and relations to our country, and while they look upon everything as perfect in their own country, they will see nothing but imperfection in the British constitution. They entertain the highest ideas of their own freedom and independence, while neither is substantially possessed. The most lawless and outrageous acts are committed in the Western & Southern States bordering upon the Mississippi by mobs and individuals in vindication of what the Mobocracy would call the peo-

ple's rights, and altho' in such cases the laws are obviously outraged, so weak and impotent is the arm of law as well as public sentiment that these acts go unpunished, the grand juries being generally composed of the same classes with the offenders, and being either thus, or otherways, influenced.

In the slave states the most appalling atrocities are committed. I heard a series of public lectures a few weeks ago on the subject of slavery which is fast becoming the all engrossing subject of interest and discussion in this country and the disclosures were fearful and degrading. Still, the American feeling throughout the South, and to a greatly preponderating extent in the Northern States, is in favor of the continuance of slavery, and this blot on the national character will not be obliterated till the country has undergone an internal revolution which probably, tho' not so certainly, will result in the dismemberment of the states from the Federal Union and separate confederations be formed: pro slavery in the South, and anti slavery in the North.

Since we came into this territory the printing office of an abolition paper in Lexington, State of Kentucky, was forcibly broken open, and the press carried off and destroyed. This was not done covertly, but by the "free citizens" associated and organized for the previously avowed purpose. Public meetings were convened and a committee under the general appointment waited upon the editor to have the press voluntarily surrendered, and

7. In August, 1845 a large number of residents of Lexington assembled and requested Cassius M. Clay to discontinue the publication of his abolition paper, True American. A committee of sixty then proceeded to the newspaper office, boxed the press and type, and sent them to Cincinnati. All transportation expenses were paid by the committee and Clay was notified of the action. Niles National Register, 68:408-9 (August 30, 1845).

when this was refused, the mob accomplished their purpose by force. And yet, so politically was this action looked upon, that the "Washington Union," which is the Government Organ and of course a democratic paper cooperating with the Slave Holders, applauded and justified this forcible seizure of personal property, mob violence, and the invasion of the right of free discussion. If a "freeman" under the American Constitution and Law may not speak out his sentiments upon such an all engrossing subject as slavery, constituting as it does the subject of free discussion and reprobation in all European States, what is "American freedom" worth? If for speaking out, he shall be crushed by a lawless mob, where is the difference between this and the vilest despotism?

We like the country, but dislike the people. The great objection consists in the obnoxious dispositions of the Americans. We have been much amused with the astonishment expressed by our Neighbours at the bare thought of our returning to Scotland, so preferable do they consider their own country to any other;; and they were again astonished at the fact that we came out merely to see their country and visit relatives "without thinking of making a cent by the journey." The loss or gain of a dollar enters into all their calculations, and any other motive is to them quite inappreciable.

In speaking of the Americans as I have done, I am always to be understood as having reference to the population of the interior. The Americans occupy a vast extent of settled country, and we have been too much accustomed to consider the population

of the Atlantic cities as an exemplification of the native American, but as well may England and her people be judged under the study of Ireland and its population, as the American people from the population of the Atlantic cities. Our chief intercourse has been with the Eastern inhabitants, and hence our opinions and judgements have been formed; but when it is considered that the United States now contain a population of 17 Millions, exclusive of 3 Millions of Slaves, and that the whole Eastern cities from Maine to New Orleans contain not more than One Million, it is at once seen what an inadequate & partial index to the general population this limited number can form. The agricultural population comprises more than two thirds. It was among this class we resided throughout the Winter, and it is from 7 months intercourse with this preponderating class that our opinions have been formed.

The climate of Wisconsin Territory is very good, excepting in the autumnal season when bilious fever or fever and ague sometimes makes its appearance. Last Autumn this fever was unprecedentedly prevalent. The Summer had been unusually dry and hot, creating a great deal of malaria from vegetable decompositions, and hence the unhealthiness of the Autumn. In many instances the fever was fatal, and I had frequent premonitory symptoms, but with care and medical aid I avoided fever.

Throughout the Winter the weather was generally agreeable and suitable for out of door exercise; generally a cold dry bracing atmosphere with little or no rain. In December and again in March the thermometer was very low, and the cold severe. During these months and the intervening period loaded wagons were

to be seen upon the lake; and while others were then complaining of the cold, we felt not much different to what we had been accustomed in our own country. This difference in feeling we attributed to a difference in habits and temperament. The Americans use strongly heated stoves in their apartments, always sitting close to these, and never going out of doors for the sake of exercise; while they are bilious from the nature of the climate, phlegmatic in their temper, and inert in all their domestic & personal habits, unless where a Dollar is to be made and then they are ever scheming, and busy as bees. On the other hand we kept our rooms moderately heated, using many open fireplaces, and walked out every day when the weather permitted, thus adapting ourselves to the climate.⁸

⁸The Drews left Geneva on April 28 and, after visiting a number of Eastern cities, returned to Glasgow. A microfilm copy of the portion of Drew's journal describing their Wisconsin visit is owned by the Society.