Moorhead Daily News Saturday, February 5, 1938

Levi Thortvedt Describes Trek of Covered Wagon Caravan to Valley

First Weekly Installment of Historical Document Appears Today

Departure from Norway, Settlement in Wisconsin, Beginning of Journey Told

Editors Note: Written by the late Levi Thortvedt, one of the earliest settlers in this section of the Red River Valley, the Daily News herewith presents the first weekly installment of a story of pioneer life which we believe will be of interest to all residents of Northwestern Minnesota. Beginning with the start of a caravan from Houston county, Minnesota, overland by covered wagon to the fertile banks of the Buffalo River a few miles northeast of Moorhead, this document is replete with adventures of a band of settlers seeking

By LEVI THORTVEDT

We left Telemarken, Norway (Fyresdal) in 1861 and after a journey of eight weeks landed in Quebec, Canada. We left there on the Canadian railroad and crossed the steam ferry at Detroit, Michigan, then by rail to Chicago. We stayed there two days with relatives. From there we went to La Crosse, Wisconsin, and on to Highland Prairie (Tveitane Dalen) along the south fork of the Root River. Lived there for two years and then bought land at Mound Prairie, Houston County, Minnesota. Lived there until May 18, 1870.

It was on that day (May 18, 1870) that a little band of Norwegians started for the West Red River Valley or Ottertail county as their destination.

The Red River Valley had been ably and well described by Paul Hjelm Hansen, a United States land commissioner. His articles appeared in a Norwegian paper published at Minneapolis, and in the paper "Fadrenelandet and Emigranten" (The Fatherland and the Emigrant) published by F A Huser at LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

Three Families

This little band of settlers consisted of three families, four single men and one old man, with a big mule and a single wagon. The leader of this little flock of home seekers was my father, Ola Gunderson Thortvedt. We were six in our family: father, mother (Thone Saangdal Thortvedt); three sisters, Joraand, who was sixteen years of age; Thone, thirteen years old; and Signe, the youngest of the family, was seven years old; myself, Leif Levi, was ten years old.

We had two covered wagons, one drawn by a team of horses and the other by a team of oxen. We had four cows and a heifer, two yearling colts and thirteen head of sheep. About twenty-five chickens were housed in lath crates fastened behind the wagon. Halvor Fendalstveit (Salveson) drove our team of oxen on one of father's wagons.

The second family was Aanon (Gunderson) Gjeitsta, my father's brother. There were also six in his family" himself, his wife Thone, and their four sons, Gunder, eleven years old; Gustav, seven years old; John, five years old; and Andreas, only three years old. They had an old team of oxen and two cows.

The third family was Tarjei Skrei and his wife, Gunhild, and their only child, Signe, four years old. The Skreis left their home on Corn Creek, Houston county, driving their yoke of oxen. They also had two cows.

The single men were Olga Midgarden, Halvor Fendalsveit (Salverson), Ola Anderson and Tarjei Muhle. Tarjei Muhle had a yoke of steers and took some of Skrei's stuff in his wagon. Ole Midgarden drove Skrei's oxen, while he drove the cattle and sheep aided by Ola Anderson and sometimes by mother, Joraand and Thone.

"Unknown West"

At twelve o'clock this day, the 18th of May, 1870, all these people gathered at Houston village from their homes in Mound Prairie township. We camped outside of town for dinner and did some shopping. At four o'clock we started for the "Unknown West."

About two miles west of Houston near Cushen's Peak, we pitched our first overnight camp and I remember the trouble we had with the cattle…they wanted to go home again and they scattered all over, and went up a high bluff covered with all kinds of trees. Nearly all of us had to help gather the cattle around the wagons again, and a night shift was put to watch them.

The next morning everything was OK with all the cattle there. We started again and the other side of Cushen Peak Ridge was very stony and steep. The wagon axle broke on the lead wagon; that was a hard one in the start of a 400-mile trip. A farmer on his way to Houston told my father that there was a good blacksmith living a half mile from there and told him where to go. He got the axle loose and put it on his shoulder and started off. In a couple of hours he was back with it welded so good that the welding could not be seen. As soon as the axle was on again we started and reached a mile west of Rusford (Rushford), where we camped over night near a cemetery.

North Prairie
Friday, the 20th, we started to cross the North Prairie and this is a high place and far across. We camped overnight somewhere on this prairie. On the next morning we started on for a couple of hours and came out on a high bluff and looked right down on Chatfield. We stopped and wondered how to get down. We had to put rough locks on the rear of our wagons and yet the wagons pushed on the teams, but finally got down and crossed a creek. We were in Chatfield near a little place called Marion and got to Rochester, Olmstads county (Olmsted).

This was a ice little town with fine stone buildings. It was Saturday and we inquired for a place to camp as we did not travel on Sunday. We were informed by a generous fellow that there was a good place two miles west of Rochester on a high knoll. We got the directions and found it. It was a fine elevation, gently rounded and about 40 acres of prairie and plenty of water nearby. Everybody was well pleased with this magnificent camping ground. We could see all over the country of Rochester.

Violin Livens Party In the evening when the campfires were going for the supper cooking, I suddenly woke from my slumber; the lively sound of a violin was heard. This was the first time I knew that there was a fiddle along with us, and a feller that could play it. It was Tarjei Muhle sitting on the wagon pole playing old time dance music. Beg pardon, it was not called old time dance music, but was called waltzes, polkas, and cotillions. Later the cotillions were called quadrills, and still later, square dances. This little stunt of Tarjei Muhle made me feel good and enthusiastic and livened up the whole party for that matter. We had our usual supper consisting of sweet milk mush and milk.
Sunday we didn't move on, as the sheep and cattle needed rest and to fill up good on grass. Some of the boys went down to Rochester, only two miles away, to spent part of the day. I will never forget this camping place where we could see for miles, especially to the east and to the south.

Camp at Pine Island
Monday, May 23rd, we started slowly on our long, long journey. We got as far as Pine Island or about half a mile north of there and camped overnight. The next morning we moved on again, passing Zumbrota and made White Rock Creek where we camped for the night. This road was very sandy and stony and ran around a wood covered bluff or hill.
We reached Cannon Falls Wednesday night, crossed the Cannon River on a pontoon bridge and camped. This was the first pontoon bridge I had ever seen. Cannon Falls is a nice town.

By Thursday evening we had reached Vermillion River and by Friday we were within three miles of St. Paul. Saturday, May 28, we moved on towards St. Paul. The road was crooked and downhill and lay between the high bluff and the great Mississippi River, a very narrow stretch of land. Nearer to St Paul we saw a few houses, some stores, and a blacksmith shop. This is what I suppose is now South St. Paul. We finally came to the great bridge over the Mississippi river. It was long and low down on the South St Paul Side and very high on the St Paul side.

St Paul Impressive
St. Paul made quite a showing to me, lying on a high sandstone bluff. It shown yellowish with the monster buildings on the top of the bluff. It was a beautiful site. The big river

with steamboats, two were at the docks, and one was steaming up the river towards the high bridge – I tell you it was a sight for me! We had to stop here a while and make arrangements with the bridge man. It was a toll bridge. It cost twenty-five cents per wagon, ten cents per head of cattle and five cents per head of sheep. Chickens in their crates went free.

Travel Through Streets

Crossing the bridge we were right in the busy streets of St. Paul, which were very narrow with tall buildings on both sides. I wondered how we could get through here with all our contraptions, six covered wagons and a lot of cattle and sheep. Luckily there were no street cars to be found in 1870. The people of St. Paul did not take much notice of us, evidently it was not the first moving outfit that had passed through their streets. We got through in fine shape, although it seemed to take quite a while. We were now headed for St. Anthony, which was a little town on the northeast side of the Mississippi river, just across from Minneapolis.

The Mississippi with its rippling waters and swift current was shining against the glare of the sun. High buildings were seen on the other side of the river. They told me that was Minneapolis. Somewhere along here we came to a wonderful scenic place with a bridge across a little stream, which seemed to be in an awful hurry to reach the Mississippi. A fine waterfall, about 20 feet high, was seen just below the bridge. The wagons were set to one side of the road, while this magnificent waterfall was truly inspected. We went below the falls and looked up on it. The water dropped about 20 feet, perpendicular. It shivered and shone like silver! It looked something like Minnehaha which I have seen later, but this was the first time I had ever seen a waterfall.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, February 12, 1938

Settlers Meet Train of Red River Carts on Trek

Second Installment of Levi Thortvedt Historical Account Relates Arrival at Sauk Center, Lake Osakis, Alexandria; Meet Probstfield, Hutchinson.

Editor's Note: In this second installment of the late Levi Thortvedt's historical account of a band of early settlers who traveled overland to the fertile Red River Valley in 1870, is told how the party, with ox and horse0drawn covered wagons, toiled through the mud on their westward march, reaching Elk River and ST. Cloud. Here they had their first view of the famous "Red River Carts" a "train" of 50 of them. Pushing on to Sauk Center, then encountering Lake Osakis, they finally reached Alexandria, then the land office for the entire northwestern part of Minnesota. Their thrill at seeing Big Pelican Lake for the first time, and their meeting with E R Hutchinson and R M Probstfield, early settlers near Moorhead, are recounted.

Well, the wagons started to move again and I had to leave this interesting and grand scenery. A mile or so north of St. Anthony we camped. Next morning, Sunday, May 29, we moved three or four miles in order to get a better camping place. We found one with plenty of grass, water and fuel. Here we stayed Sunday. It was raining a little. Some of us children went out on a little trip to look around. One of the little boys, John Aanonsen, wanted to go back to camp and he went. A while later the rest of us went to camp and John's mother inquired for him, he was missing, and a general hunt was on. Thone, my sister, who had been with us on our expedition, walked up the railroad track and met two men leading John, five years old. These men had seen the campers and rightly thought that this lost boy belonged to the movers. Thone brought him home to camp and the panic was over.

The next day we did not move because it was raining heavily, and on Tuesday the moving was very slow on account of the muddy roads. We came as far as Coon Creek where we made camp. We passed through Anoka, crossed the Rum River and came within a couple of miles of Elk River village. Within the next three days we moved through Elk River, Baker Station and Cable Station. Saturday, June 4, we got into East St. Cloud. Here were a few stores and a saloon. The door was open to the saloon. It was a lively place, where a half breed was playing a fiddle. Tarjei Muhle, who was a fiddler himself, asked what the name of the tune was. "Red River Jig" was the answer. **Red River Carts**

We crossed the Mississippi for the last time on our journey and reached St. Cloud, which was quite a place in 1870. It was the terminal for the Red River Cart Train that brought furs and hides from the northwest. Here was the first time we had seen these carts and there were about 50 of them, I think.

Sunday, the fifth, was a typical June morning, June 5, 1870, with fine sunshine and clear blue skies. The half breeds were busy rounding up their ponies and oxen so that they would not get too far away. Later the church bells began to ring and the people flocked to church. Mother asked us if we would like to go and we were willing. It was a big church with high steeple. The door which faced north stood wide open. We looked in, it was decorated in brilliant colors. I don't think any of us got a word of the sermon, but we felt well repaid for our walk.

Find Strawberries
From St. Cloud our road lay in a southwesterly direction until we reached Richmond, then in a northwesterly direction, winding over a rolling prairie, with no trees to be seen, but oh my! A lot of strawberries on both sides. Wherever you looked the wagons were standing still and everybody filling up on the finest berries in the world. Pails and other cups were filled before the journey continued. We moved on slowly as there were some soft and bad places.

We moved along for several days along the prairie, with nothing of interest to be seen. On Saturday, June 11, we reached Sauk Center, which lay at the southwest end of Big Sauk Lake. In this little town mother purchased a cast iron matchholder, with two holders in one. And sir! We have this relic with us yet. **An Old Acquaintance**

It was here also that my uncle Aanon's dog got crazy and had to be shot. After the dog trouble the men went up town and sir! they met an old acquaintance, Tallef Flateland. I guess he was some relation to Ola Midgarden. This fellow had a lawyer's education and was a very liberal talker, and the party got a lot of information for land seekers. We learned that the next town west was Alexandria, the land office for the northwestern part of Minnesota.

We are now coming into a more wooded country, the road lay along the south end of Lake Osakis, the biggest lake I had ever seen. It was timbered all around and had fine graveled shores. We camped here and everybody praised this wonderful place, but had to leave it the next morning.
Tuesday, June 14, we reached Alexandria. Here we saw the first "Blanket Indians" since we left Houston county. We had seen plenty of them there, but I think some of the women got a little nervous seeing these wild savages away out in the west. There are supposed to be thousands of them scattered all over the northwest. Here are four or five Indian tepees. I remember one tall old Indian with his red blanket over his shoulder, drunk as an English lord and very talkative. Some of the men had quite a talk with him. **Day in Alexandria**

We spent the next day in Alexandria, purchasing supplies as it was our last chance to buy certain articles. We bought utensils, stoves, axes, spades, grindstones, breaking plows, scythes, and whetstones. We also got the two inch augers so necessary for building of log cabins.
Here we met Ola Strandvold who was back to buy supplies. He had taken up a claim in the Red River valley, about two miles south of Georgetown, Minnesota, a Hudson Bay post. His claim was on the North Dakota side of the river. He gave us new enthusiasm, as now we had a leader who was acquainted with the roads and camping places. They went to the land office for information about maps, vacant, surveyed, and unsurveyed lands. The land office agent happened to be an old acquaintance of my mother's way back in Norway. He gave us all the information he could. Here was also the home of Knute Nelson, who became governor of Minnesota and later United States Senator, but we had not heard of him in those days. **Chippewa Station**

With Ola Strandvold in the lead, we moved on the next day and with much heavier loads. Roads were hilly and winding around small lakes, heavily wooded. We

camped at Chippewa Station, near a little lake that we compared to one in Norway called Rodeivsta Vateni. It was inspiring to father and mother.

We traveled through Evansville and came to Pelican Lake, where we made camp. Oh! What fine scenery! Our camp is about 30 or 40 feet above the lake, which is about a half mile across. Something wonderful to see was three or four big white stones in the lake that shone like white pelicans. It was believed in our camp that these stones were the reason why it was so rightly called Pelican Lake. We spent a restful Sunday here. Our horses, cattle and sheep did not go far from camp as the short fine grass, mixed with wild prairie tea, suited them good enough. Tarjei Muhle played his fiddle for us and that added to my cheerfulness, too.

The next morning we moved on and camped at a place called Stony Brook for dinner. There are plenty of stones here. There is one little thing that has made me remember this place and that is that the air was full of those four winger "Devil's Needles" (Augne Stinger is the Norwegian name for them) and Sir! There were red, green, blue and silver bodies on those things.

Coming to Pomme-de-terre river, we had to fort it as there is no bridge and Aanon, my uncle, got stuck. Of course his oxen were old and poor. One more yoke of oxen was put on and the wagon came out. The station was on the west side of the river on a high knoll, with an old stockade fence around the unpainted buildings. It was kind of a lonesome sight. **Meet Hutchinson, Probstfield**

We came to a lake called Lightning lake and camped for the night. After a while a couple of men with a pair of ponies on a double buggy came and camped nearby. After supper my father went over to them and they asked him where he was going. When he said, "The Red River Valley," they became very talkative as they lived there. They said, "You are heading for the greatest farming country in the world." They described this land and it was the same description as Paul Hjelm Hanson and Ola Strandvold (now of our company) had given. Ole came over to them and shook hands as he knew them both. One was his close neighbor, who lived across the river on the Minnesota side. His name was E R Hutchinson. The other was R M Probstfield who lived farther up the river also on the Minnesota side.

They were old-timers in the Red River valley. Hutchinson had been in the employment of the Hudson Bay company for fourteen years and Probstfield for twelve years. They were on a trip to St. Cloud for certain provisions.

Ferry Ottertail River

Tuesday, June 21, we moved on in clear weather. The country is getting more level. Far to the east we could see blue hills. It was what they call Leaf Mountains in Ottertail county about 20 miles away and timber could be seen here and there, far to the east. Towards night we reached Old Crossing. Here was a ferry on which to cross the Ottertail river. It was a toll ferry. We finally got all our contraptions over and camped. Out on a sharp bend of the river, stood a long row of buildings. It was Stage Station.

A long Red River cart train of about 40 carts came and was set across. They were loaded with furs from Hudson Bay company and headed for St. Paul.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, February 19, 1938

Settlers Reach Moorhead In Quest for Virgin Lands

Levi Thortvedt Describes Journey from ottertail River to Camp at Burbank Hotel, Early Landmark Here; Tells of First sigh of Buffalo River

Editor's Note: Herewith is the third installment of the historical story told by the late Levi Thortvedt, early Clay County settler. In previous installments he described experiences at the start of the overland trek in 1870 from Houston County, Minnesota, to the Red River Valley, reaching the Ottertail River. The arrival at the old Burbank hotel which marked the site of Moorhead, and later at a camp near Georgetown, are described today.

By LEVI THORTVEDT

The Ottertail River is actually the Red River of the North, but is not called so until it has joined the Bois de Sioux at Breckenridge. Neither the Bois de Sioux nor the Ottertail have many trees along their banks, but after the junction the Red River is thickly wooded. It flows north to Winnipeg Lake and thence to Hudson Bay. At Breckenridge commences a valley that is 50 miles wide and 250 miles long, "the Great Red River Valley." When you get into the valley you don't think there is any valley about it, as the hills are so far away on either side that you can't see them. It is 25 miles to the hills on either side of the river.

Level Prairie

We took the cut-off road that runs in a northwesterly direction. We are here on a nearly level prairie, with no trees to be seen. After a while a long thin blueish streak could be seen on the western horizon. It was the timber along the Red River. We finally reached the river a ways north of Breckenridge and camped at a projecting point. The mosquitoes were very bad. This was our first night in the Red River Valley.

From here we moved on slowly, meeting Red River carts off and on. We crossed Whiskey Creek and camped for the night. The timber along this creek extended far eastward, and Sir! the water in it was the same color as whiskey. The mosquitoes were terrible and later in the evening it started to rain.

Visit McCauleyville

It rained all next day. Some of the men took a little walk south along the Red River on the Minnesota side and came to McCauleyville. There was one little store and a few other buildings. They crossed the river to Fort Abercrombie, ND. There were 250 soldiers stationed here and this was a grand sight for the settlers up in this Indian county, far from civilization. There were many wagons standing around, and a lot of horses and cattle grazing.

Saturday we moved along slowly in the mud and reached "Twenty-five Mile Point." This was 25 miles south of Georgetown, Minnesota, hence the name. Georgetown, an old Hudson Bay post, was located where the Buffalo River joins the Red River. Twenty-five Mile Point is a prominent camping place for the cart trains that bring the furs from the northwest to St. Cloud. There are also other points named by the number of miles they are from Georgetown, as "Twelve Mile Point," where Moorhead now is, and "Ten Mile Point," where Probstfield lived.

French Half Breeds

The next day was Sunday so we did not move. It was a bright day and I remember I saw about 40 or 50 half breeds taking a bath in the Red River. A little to the northwest of our

camp there were also a lot of "half breed carts" as we called them because they were manned by French half breeds.

June 28, we moved along the Red River trail or the Pembina Trail is it was sometimes called. Every now and then we would meet these half breed carts and I want to tell you something about these caravans. It was a pictureseque sight when you saw sometimes 90 or 100 of these carts loaded down or top loaded with furs, buffalo hides, deer hides, bear, beaver, mink and muskrat skins, sometimes an ox and sometimes a pony on the cart. The half breeds were dressed in their buckskin suits, wide hats and neck long hair. A raw hide string over their left shoulder kept their tobacco pouch hanging nicely over their right hip. The pouches were large and decorated with glass beads of all the colors of the rainbow. They contained mostly what is known as Indian "Kentkanick" with a little tobacco mixed in.

Carts Smelled, Creaked

One half breed on a pony drove from four to six carts, one after the other. There was quite a wild smell when these caravans passed and Sir! you could hear the squeaking of the wooden exles in the wooden hubs for six miles with a favorable wind.

This old Red River trail is quite a sight by itself when you look at it. There are three or sometimes four roads lying side by side, worn deep ruts in the prairie. They were smooth and nice with three ruts to each trail, one for each wheel and one for the ox or pony in the center. Our horses would be sure to blow their noses every time we met a half breed cart train, showing fear caused mostly by the wild smell of these animal hides and the half breeds themselves. They had plenty of dogs and mutts with them, too.

Brilliant Sight

You never would believe that Minnesota could produce such a brilliant sight as the Red River did in 1870 and a little later. Here we were moving slowly northwards. The sky was a clear blue, the woods on one side and the prairie on the other as level as a lake, shining brilliantly of yellow and dark violet mixed. It was the yellow sunflowers and the violet flowers. I have not learned the names of them to this day. They were a kind of weed growing the same height as a sunflower, with flowers five or six inches long and less than an inch wide, colored dark violet or between violet and lavender. It made a fine sight and lively and oceans of it as far as we see, I wish that the people of this day could have just one glimpse of the valley as it looked way back in the half breed cart days of the 1870's.

These carts were the common means of transportation. They were very simple in construction. They had two big, clumsy wheels, 6 feet, 3 inches high, with two tapering shafts 11 feet, 3 inches long. These were bolted to a 5 by 6 axel by heavy iron belts. A platform of boards form the bottom and fasten from shaft to shaft. The box is 5 feet long and 33 inches wide, with inch plus 33 inches high. It has a railing on top. Up to 1500 pounds could be haled on these carts. It is estimated in the "Biography of Minnesota" that there were from 6 to 7 thousand of these carts throughout the northwest.

These carts were made and sold to the Indians and half breeds by the Hudson Bay Company and other fur companies.

Burbank Hotel

Towards evening it began to rain a little. Ola Strandvold, who was acquainted with this part of the trail, said "We will have to make Burbank's hotel, where we can have some shelter." We made this place. It was an old building made of hewn logs, with a fairly good roof, but the door and windows were out. The mosquitoes were the worst we had ever experienced. My mother made milk mush (melke grod) and Sir! when the pot was filled with milk and placed over the camp fire, it was a stiff, rich mixture of sweet milk and mosquitoes. Mother threw the milk away and filled up the kettle again with fresh milk, but the same thing

happened and also for the third time. The third time she threw the pot away with such vigor that it almost struck a nearby calf in the head. We went supperless to bed that night. There must have been billions upon billions of these seemingly patched together and weakly built insects. It was the number of them that did the business. The next morning there was a layer of dead mosquitoes 6 or 7 inches high around the ashes of the camp fire. This sounds like a fish story, but can you prove that it was not the fact?

Wednesday, June 29, was a fine morning. A lot of half breed carts had come in the night and when they had found the old house occupied, had camped a little ways off. We took plenty of time this morning as the roads were real muddy and we are nearly to our destination.

Built in 1860-68

The history of the old house (Burbank Hotel) as told by Hon. R. M. Probstfield is as follows: It was built in 1860 by a man whose name was Torgerson, who lived there with his family. In the early part of August, 1862, he was notified by a half breed friend that the Indians were coming. That same day he loaded up his belongings and with his family started south on the Red River trail and was never heard of again.

This was the beginning of the terrible Sioux massacre that started at the upper Sioux Agency, August 17, 1862. The upper Sioux agency, also called the Big Stone agency, was located at Big Stone, SD at the south end of Big Stone Lake, just where the Minnesota River starts. Ortonville is now located at this historic site. This Indian massacre is the darkest spot in latter day history when all the settlers were driven out and many of them killed. It extended from the Iowa line to the northern boundary of Minnesota – as far west as the settler could be found. So much for that.

Bullet Holes in Logs

We are now back to our camp at the Burbank hotel. It got its name from the Burbank Stage company that used it as a stopping place. It stood where Mrs. George Sheffield's house now stands at 612 First Avenue North, Moorhead, Minnesota. A little sag in the ground can be detected, where a cellar was under the house just a little east of the ravine that has nearly been filled up by cultivation, but further out in the river the ravine shows up good yet. A lot of thick and tall weeds grew all over the west side of the house. Bullet holes could be plainly seen in the hewn logs … from the attack by the Indians.

Late in the afternoon we moved on northwards on the Red River trail and after a while crossed a big deep coulee. At the projecting point of the river stood an old cabin. A Frenchman had taken this as his cabin. It was a nice place with many small or young oaks growing on the level prairie. Half a mile farther north was another point, now Georgetown, Minnesota.

Probstfield's Home

A good oak post fence stood on the west side of the road and a lot of small trees planted on the inside of the fence. A fine house of hewn logs, a stable, and a couple of other small buildings stood a ways inside the fence, and close to the river bank, just ample room for a driveway between river and house Here is where R. M. Probstfield lives.

Ola Strandvold said that Probstfield was one of those agreeable fellows we met way down Lightning Lake in Wilkin County.

We camped a little ways north on a point between the river and the big coulee. As we were having our supper a Government Wagon came along and camped nearby. They were hauling supplies to Fort Pembina and Fort Totten. They had three or four Howitzers or small cannons mounted on two wheels. Four horses could be put on and they could move over the prairies in a gallop, if the Indians needed a trimming up!

Thursday, June 30, we followed the trail northwards. Sometime during the afternoon I noticed a long string of woods which I thought was along the Red River, "but how can this be?" thought I, "can the river be turning around and running south again?" I had heard that this river ran due north for about 200-300 miles, and now it was just like we got into a big horseshoe of timber. I had to get father to ask Ola Strandvold to explain.

Was Buffalo River

"No," said Ola, "that is the timber of the Buffalo river you see over there. It gets into the Red River at Georgetown." This explanation satisfied me. We turned off the trail and went due west to the Red River. We came to the river. Here is where E. R. Hutchinson lives, two miles south of Georgetown. He was the other man we met at Lightning Lake. He had a little log cabin that stood a little ways to the south of the road that goes down to the river. There was a ferry to get across the river. Another thing that stays in my mind is that the Hutchinson children came over and pointed at our flock of sheep. They had apparently never seen sheep before. Hutchinson was not at home but he had a man to take care of the ferry. Of course we got across the river and were now in Dakota Territory. This sounded a little harsh as we had always heard that it was full of hostile Sioux Indians. We drove through big heavy timber with elm trees for about a quarter of a mile and then camped for the night. Ola Strandvold had left us now and driven over to his own homestead, about two miles farther north on the river.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, February 26, 1938

Settlers End Trek, Find Home Site Along Buffalo

Levi Thortvedt describes discovery of wonderful land along winding stream in Clay County; Prepare to fil claims on Virgin Soil.

Herewith is the fourth installment of the historical story told by the late Levi Thortvedt, early Clay county settler. In previous installments he told of the start in 1870 of the overland trek from Houston County, Minnesota, to the Red River Valley and experiences encountered, finally reaching the old Burbank hotel which marked the site of Moorhead and on to a camp near the Hudson Bay post at Georgetown. Today's installment tells of the journey's end – the finding of a lovely spot along the Buffalo River where the Thortvedts established their home.

We are camped where the river makes a fine curve. It is deep and wide, with the clay colored water which is so peculiar with the Red River of the North. You can take a pail of it, and let it stand for half an hour, and you will have a think layer of yellow, white clay in the bottom of the pail.

Now the land-picking was the next on the program – for here is plenty of land – the whole of North and South Dakota Territory. Plenty of land boy! with only one settler in what is now known as Cass County, ND. That was our friend, Ole Strandvold, who had taken up his claim about a mile southwest of Georgetown on the Dakota side of the river. His old homestead is just in the bend where the Buffalo River runs into the Red River.

He took his claim in 1869; there might have been one or two more who had taken claims in Cass County but I have never heard of them.

Take Long Hikes

At this place we stayed a week, taking long hikes to look at the land. One day father, Ola Midgarden, and Tarjei Muhle went way up on the west side of the Sheyenne River, which enters the Red River about two miles from where we camped. Another hike was taken to the shouth and they swam in the Sheyenne River and proceeded along the Red River as far south as Fargo is now located.

They came to a big slough and found a place to cross near the river. This slough is still prominent in the south part of Fargo, and was described by my father must have been what is now known as Island Park. At this point they turned back and retraced their steps to the camp.

I well remember the great Dakota prairie, with tall grass and level as a lake, as far as the eye could see. It looked kind of gloomy toward evening.

Tussle With Old Ox

One day one of my Uncle Aanon's oxen was missing, and after a while the old ox appeared on the Minnesota side of the river. It was a problem to get him back over the wide, deep and muddy Red River. There was one young man in the party by the name of Ola Anderson who was a good swimmer. He went down to the river, got ready, and swam across and after a long tussle with the old ox finally got him into the river. Ola followed him closely to guide him. Across on the other side the men stood ready with long ropes to pull the ox out of the mud and up on the land – then there was a jubilee in camp and father gave Ola a dollar for the good job.

Some way or other they were not satisfied with the land here in Dakota; long slough or wire grass all over the prairie, so they were afraid that the land was subjected to be

flooded; and another thing that was fresh in their minds, the Indians! You must remember that it was only eight years since the terrible massacre.

Friday, July 3, we broke camp and again crossed the Hutchinson ferry and started south on the Red River Trail, heading to Otter Tail County .. coming as far as Probstfield's, where we camped for dinner. He had just returned from St. Cloud and was out plowing his corn. He recognized our party and asked father where he was heading for now.

"Otter Tail County," said father.

"What's the matter with the land in Dakota?" asked Probstfield, and father said it was too low, with too much slough grass and even driftwood was found on the prairie. These are the chief reasons for leaving.

Recommends the Buffalo River

"Well, if its higher land you want, I can tell you where you can find it," he said and father asked where that was. Probstfield in answer points over to the Buffalo River, the timber of which could be plainly seen. He also made the remark about the Buffalo country being so ghigh that at the Hudson Bay Company had to do at Georgetown during high floods was to drive their cattle and horses a little ways up the Buffalo River, and it was dry. And Sir! Probtsfield goes on to say with considerable effect, "If the land on the Buffalo River does not suit you, you can just as well drive back to where you came from because you won't find land in the whole United States that will."

Well, father became very interested and asked him if they could get him to show them the land. "I can't," said Probstfield, "I have to plow my corn." "Well," said my father, "we will get somebody to plow the corn." "Well, can he drive straight?" asked Probstfield. Father then said they would put on two men to lead the horses and another to hold the plow. This was perfectly satisfactory to him. So after dinner Tarjei Muhle and Ola Midgarden offered to do the plowing. Jim, our big breated bay horse, was hitched to Probstfield's buggy, and father and Probstfield got in. Uncle Aanon put Probstfields' saddle on old man Weum's mule, Jerry, and thus the trio stared for the Buffalo River

Kassenborg Point

"Now we will make for the south end of the heavy timber you see, over there," said Probstfield while pointing in a northeasterly direction to what was later known as "Kassenborg Point."

When they got there they stopped while Probstfield explained all the land north of this point was surveyed a long time ago and sold to "Speculators" by the government for 25 cents an acre to get money with which to carry on the Civil War. "Oh my," said father, 'It is too bad that this land is speculator land as this is the finest land we have seen."

:Just wait a while and you will see just as fine land if not finer, when we come farther up the river," said Probstfield. "Now all the land south and east of here is unsurveyed as yet and you can take what you want."

The proceeded in a southeasterly direction and reached about where Gunder Lee's farm is now and kept on going up along the river. Coming to what we now call "Old Fish Place," father wanted to stop and just look. Here was a very fine bend of the river, and this is our home now … the Thortvedt farm. After a while, they proceeded farther until they reached the "Forks," where the South Buffalo River enters the North Buffalo.

Hundreds of Wild Ducks

They Followed the South Buffalo up about one and a half miles. Here is no timber, and the river is about three times the width of the present Buffalo river, but very shallow with wild rice growing all over and the water is hardly moving. Looked something like a big slough with hundreds of wild ducks and brants.

Coming to the frist bunch of timber, where the Buffalo turns south, Probstfield got so dry that they decided to turn home to his place as fast as they could go. Here and there were big stretches of rough prairie, where the short stubby buffalo grass grew in bunches and between the bunches deep crevices and this made it impossible to go fast, as it would shake the liver out of most anybody. So Uncle Aanon suggested that Probstfield ride the mule and then he could make good time over this rough ground. "But what will old man Weum say?" said father to Aanon, and Aanon to father, to which father replied, "We don't care what he says." So Probstfield got on the mule and rode in a gallop as far as we could see, and soon got out of sight.

Father and Aanon went more slowly and at dusk reached camp. Father was thoroughly convinced that the land they had seen today was the finest and the most inducing for settlers to settle on in the whole state of Minnesota! Father had made up his mind to settle there, even though the rest of the company would leave again.

"Old Fish Place"

Saturday, July 9, good and early in the morning we started off with father in the lead, across the prairie to the Buffalo River. Father's aim was to hit the big, fine bend previously mentioned, and then Sir! in a straight line across the prairie to "Old Fish Place."

We reached here about 1 o'clock – all the wagons were set side by side, with the wagon poles pointing to the big bend … everybody stood dumbfounded and looked and looked on this wonderful land. The whole bend looked something like a field of tall barley, so high that you could not see the sheep. None of the company knew at that time what this wonderful grass was called, but later found out that it was "needle grass," which is probably not the name given it by the botanist, but just the same, the most fitting name for it. It had a lot of sharp needles on it with twisting tail and would bore itself into the flesh of the sheep, which we found out so well later.

One of the first things I did was to go to the river to see if it was deep enough. I like big rivers, but to my regret it was a small and easy going one, that seemed to take its time to reach the Red River. It is about 25 feet across and averages 4 feet deep of nice clear water. It is fed entirely by springs as we have found out later and it runs in a northwesterly direction until it hits the Red River at Georgetown. The river was full of catfish, pike, and pickerel, a fact which was quickly found out when a couple of the younger men had got out their fish lines and Sir! we had good, fat boiled catfish for our first dinner.

Plenty of Hay

The afternoon was taken with leisure, but they made a little trip around. Tarjei Skrei, Halvor Salveson and Ola Midgarden went up the river till they came to a slough, which was later known as "Skrei slough." This place suited Tarjei fine, as here was plenty of hay and he was a cow man.

The next morning some more skirmishing was done around to get more settled on which laim to take, as there were plenty of them, absolutely free with the exception of the $14 filing charges for 160 acres.

It was a little difficult to space themselves, because none of the party knew exactly how big a space 160 acres would take. There were no section or quarter stakes as the land was unsurveyed.

Wonderful land on the Buffalo River! With plenty of timber, elm, oak, ash, box-elder and basswood. Then the wild fruits, like chokecherry (hegber) plum, thorn apple, "gris ber" and grapes. Plenty of fish and the catfish so fat that it fried itself in the pan.

Then the nice level land ready for the plow, without having to move stump or stone. Hundreds of acres waiting for the settlers just to come and take it, and Sir! the Red River Valley is now known as the "bread basket of the world."

The four single men in our company said “You people with families take first and we will find land nearby as close as we can.”

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, March 5, 1938

Settlers Erect Cabin; Prairie Sod Is Broken

Levi Thortvedt describes first home along the Buffalo; Virgin soil feels plow first time; Stranger reveals coming of NP Railroad..

Editor's Note: Herewith is the fifth installment of the historical story told by the late Levi Thortvedt, early Clay County Settler. How the small caravan of pioneers started in 1870 from Houston County, Minnesota, to travel overland in search of virgin soil; the many experiences encountered along the way, the finding of many landmarks which still are present today, and finally their arrival in the fertile Red River Valley and location of a homestead along the banks of the Buffalo River in Clay County, are described in previous chapters. In today's installment the laborious building of a log cabin and other log structures on the homestead, first breaking of virgin soil and the arrival of a stranger with news that the Northern Pacific railroad would pass through only two miles from the farm, are related.

Monday, July 11, the wagons began to spread out. Tarjei picked his claim just around the bend to the south, and Uncle Aanon over by the next point of the river north. It was commonly accepted that father was satisfied with the spot where the wagons and camp stood, and he certainly was … but a funny thing had happened. Father made a trip round the "oddan," as we called the bend, and what did he find? White spots here and there on the trees where the bark had been chopped off and on them was written "G. G. Weum." This was a surprise for father.

This old man had been the tail end of the expedition all the time and had never been consulted about anything, and here he was the first one to pick, when a place to settle was found.

Dispute over Land

Early in the afternoon, Tarje Skrei came over to our wagon and was surprised to see that nothing was done in the way of settling down, and G. G. Weum's wagon still stood there. Tarjei said to father, "*hos kan de ha seg, er du ikke fornogde ma dette landet, Olav?*" "*Jou de a eg*," said father, "*med gamle Gunnar Veum ha tekje de*." "*Mi jev gaen i gamle Veumen, me vi ha du I mitten, so har slipesteinen*," said Tarje Skrei and thereupon asked my mother, "*Hor vil du ha stoge, Thone*?" (And now I will translate this conversation into English)

"What is the matter, Ola, ain't you satisfied with this land?"

"Yes," said father, "but old man Weum has taken it."

To which Tarjei answered with vehemence, "We don't give the devil in old man Weum, we want you in the center that has the grindstone." Then he asked mother where she wanted the house. She pointed to the spot where our house now stands. Tarjei drove the oxen and father the horses over there where they unloaded some of our stuff.

They found a big elm that stooped against the west, with wonderful thick foliage, so that if it rained, it did not hardly get wet under the tree. Here they set the stove, the first thing to be unloaded. Under another elm, father put up his blacksmith bellows. He put up a stump for the anvil. This elm we called "*Bag almen*," or bellows elm.

Slept in Wagons

Our cooking and eating was in the shade of the stooping elm tree, and the sleeping was in the wagons that stood on the level prairie. Later, the wagons were moved in the thicket near the stove for shelter. The wagon box with the covering was taken off and set on the ground to sleep in.

(From now on dates and days are forgotten.)

The first field was broken down in the "*odden*." I don't know how long it took them to do it, but it was broken. The homestead law called for five acres to be broken and shanty put up before it could be filed on. In this case the claims could not be filed because the land was not surveyed and consequently no description could be given.

From now on the full force was put on the hay. A hay rack had to be made and they were made from ash poles … young sapling elms were used to form the bows over the wheels, so they hay would not rub on the wheels. Perpendicular stakes about three feet long were put on to hold the hay.

Harvest of Honey

One thing that happened when Thone and I were cocking hay was this. Ola Anderson was cutting with a scythe and he called to us to come to get som honey. He had found a bumble bee's nest in an old gopher hole. We came and my curiosity was aroused and I had to come close to the hole. Ola was poking with a stick to get the honey. Buzz! Suddenly came a big swarm of bees right out of the hole. I made a quick jerk backwards and my back hit hard against Ola's scythe, that had been dropped near the nest. I became terribly scared. I thought my back was cut clear across. I thought sure I was going to die. An awful feeling. Ola and Thone pulled off my shirt to see how big the cut was. I asked how long it was. "Ah, shaw," said Thone, "It is not quite one inch long." I will tell you I got new life again when I knew I was not going to die from this. We got the honey and Thone and I went home where my mother dressed my wound.

Every other day, Ole Midgarden and Tarje Skrei came over to have their scythes sharpened or ground as we called it. This I remember well, Ole was doing the turning of the grindstone and Tarjei the grinding. They chewed the rag all the time. Ole wanted to show Tarjei how to grind a scythe and thus get him to turn it, but nix.

Plan for Home

When the haying was done and stacked, the next thing to do was to build a house. A little bridge was built over the river, so as to be able to haul the logs home for it. Ole Midgarden, Tarjei Muhle and Halvor Fendalsveit helped to make it.

Next morning father had a lame back very bad. He could hardly turn around in his bed. This looked kind of blue and the mosquitoes were terrible. We had to build smudges every evening and they were worse when it rained. Mother and my older sisters were milking and I had my job with a bush from the willows, trying to keep the mosquitoes away from the cow my mother was milking, but I failed, though I managed to keep most of them off.

One morning after one of these nights, mother said, "Well, we will stay here 10 years, but if there don't come any people by that time we will move." Father, who was always optimistic about the future of this country, said, "Yes, if no people come in five years, we will go again." We never saw anyone outside of those that belonged to the party, and it really did look wild, way out here one hundred and forty miles from civilization (Alexandria).

Stranger Approaches

One day as I was out on the level of the prairie, I noticed a dark speck to the southwest. It moved. It was coming closer and closer. Finally I saw it was a man. I ran and reported it to father. He asked, "Where did you see him?" I explained. "Run up again," he said, "And if he comes, tell him to come down here." I did and the man was at my side. He asked where I lived and if we had bread and milk. I took him to camp and told mother that he wanted food.

She started to prepare the meal and I took him to see father. It did not take long before there was a good conversation going on. Father asked him what his name was and what he was doing on here in the wilderness. "My name is Martin Wells, and I can give you

some pretty good news. I am one of the locaters of the Northern Pacific railroad. You will have the road not more than two miles away," he said.

This was great news for us pioneers. Mr. Wells had his bread and milk and butter, too, before he returned to his own camp a little distance away.

My sister, Thone, and I had the job of furnishing fish to the household. We hunted frogs as their hind legs were the best bait we could get. We caught catfish up to 16 and 17 pounds, pickerel and pike 4 to 6 pounds. My favorite fish was the catfish and father's, too.

Cut Logs for Home

Father started to cut logs for the house. He had taken the extra work to hew them, shorter and shorter till it got to the ridge of the roof. Elm bark was placed on the logs for the roof, then prairie sod was broken up and cut with an ax into square chunks and pieced on the rough side of the bark. Sod packed tight, so it made a water proof roof. A small upstairs was also in this house. It had a door in the center of the south wall and a full window on the west. There was a half window on the north wall. The stove was placed on the east wall and the table stood close to the window on the east wall. A double deck bed was made from hewed basswood boards, 20 inches wide and 1 ½ inches thick. We called this bed the "*over seng*" (upper bed).

Later in the fall a big elk horn was found by father and it was bolted on the projecting roof ridge log on the west end. It stood there two or three years.

The next thing was to get up a stable. This was a long, low structure, rolled up from round longs. It was built in two compartments and roofed with willow hay and sod. Then it was plastered with river mud. It was placed near the river bank, so as to get plenty of fall for the manure.

Oxen Haul Logs

Some big logs went into this stable. There was one long elm, 50 feet, nice and straight. The oxen were next to the log and the horses on the lead, yet it was all they could do to pull it 20 or 30 feet at a time. But this is what I am going to get at, that took my curiosity: Ole Anderson, our hired man, made the remark that we could hear his watch tick easily by placing it at the butt of this log and placing the ear at the top end. Father had heard of this before, but doubted it a little on this long, raw elm log. And Sir! he heard it tick plainly. Then I wanted to try it, and to my surprise heart it, too. Ain't it wonderful? This little curiosity has stayed in my head all these years.

Now, when house and stables were built and all the hay home, only routine business went on day by day.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, March 12, 1938

More Settlers Arrive to Join Buffalo River Clan

Anton Jenson family, the father singing a joyful Norwegian song, comes to file claim near Thortvedt's; Railroad surveyors appear.

Editor's Note: The sixth installment of the late Levi Thortvedt's early history of the Red River Valley is published herewith. In previous installments he described the overland trek in 1870 from Houston County to the fertile banks of the Buffalo River, Clay County, and some of the earlier experiences of filing claims and constructing the first log cabin. In today's installment the arrival of Anton Jenson and his family, the father singing a joyful Norwegian song, is related; the coming of railroad surveyors and the fear which gripped the Thortvedt family when its cows became lost and were found only after a long, torturous search.I

About the latter part of August, I think it was, something new happened. It was over at my Uncle Aanon's. It was late in the evening as told by Mrs. Aanon Gunderson. She heard voices around the bend of the river and thought it was Indians. She was quick to quench the greased lamp and fire of any kind in the house, in hopes that they might pass by. But listening with both ears wide open, the voices turned out to be singing. They all stood and listened. "Oh! My God, it is a Norwegian song!" she said. Being sure that it was not a mistake, She ran into the house, lighted the lamp again, so when these people came they saw the light. They promptly turned in. It was a happy surprise in the wilderness. Bernhard Boreson Sampson, apparently the leader of the party, came up to the house and introduced himself ; he made the rest of them acquainted.

The party consisted of Sampson, the singer; Anton Jenson, his wife Maie and her old mother; the Jensons' two sons, Jens and Jorgen, and their little sister, Marta. They were Danish.

They stayed at Uncle Aanon's three weeks, I guess. , while they hunted up their claims and built a house.

Became Sheriff

Gunder and Gustave Anderson ran over the next morning and told what had happened. About the two boys that had come, but they were older than we were. Joregen was 18, Jens, 16, and Marta about 6 years old. I remember that Jorgen built small houses for us from willow pins about 12 inches long. Jenson was sheriff for two terms, later on.

They had picked their claims four miles further down on the west side of the river, now section six, town of Moland.

Anton had been in America nine years prior to 1864, when he went back to Denmark to help fight the Germans. The Germans took Schleswig-Holstein from them at that time, so these Danes came directly from Sonnerburk, Schleswig-Holstein. They had been compelled to speak German which Jorgen and Jens spoke fluently.

Anton Jenson had a claim in Meeker County before coming here and had some scuffles with the Indians. When they came here from St. Paul, Minn., they had a dark bay ox team and an old wagon. The ox owned by Jenson and the other by Sampson. The latter became the owner of Sampson Addition, Crookston, Minn.

Saves Gold Dollar

A bit of history n 1871 – Sampson came up from the Dakota side from Georgetown with two plow lays to get them sharpened – 25 miles. When the lays were sharpened, he gave father a little gold dollar made by the United States in 1856. Father turned to me and said, "If

you will take good care of this, you can have it." I promised that I would. In 1921 there was a Saters-Lag and Telelag combined in Crookston. W e were to be there. I thought I would call and see Sampson again. Had not seen him since 1871 and I would take along the dollar he gave my father in that year. I drilled a small hole in it and used it as a watch charm. Ola Midgarden and I hunted up Mr. Sampson and made ourselves acquainted and we talked of the early days. Then I showed him the dollar. He remembered it.

Well, now back to our narrative of 1870.

Things went along day after day until one morning Thone, my sister, and I went over to "Old Fish Place" to set out our traps. I had a fine big muskrat in my trap and just as I had gotten it out we heard a yell and a splash in the river about 25 rods upstream. We looked up the river and saw men wadng across to our side dressed in red, blue and gray. We thought it was Indians and ran home, leaving muskrats, and reported the Indians were coming. Mother hollered for father, who was in the woods. He came running and asked what it was. She said we had seen Indians coming across the river. We pointed to the place and father asked, "Why do you think it was Indians?"

Surveyors Arrive

"Well, they had red blankets on," we said. Father stood and looked a while but nothing was seen. After a while something appeared moving one after another in regular Indian fashion, coming very near in the direction of our house. Father said, "Well, they are full bloods and they have clothes." They were coming closer and closer with a peculiar action, stooping down to the prairie once in a while. Then all at once father woke up and made a quick motion with his hand. "It is surveyors," and so it was.

We went down to meet them and they were equally surprised to see white people. They left their instruments and came to the house to get a good drink of milk. They asked if we had butter to sell. "Yes, plenty," was the answer. They decided to move their camp nearer to ours so it would be handy to get milk and butter.

Father asked if he could go along with them for a while to learn how to understand section stakes and quarter stakes. "Yes, sir, come," was the answer from a well-built man, apparently the leader of the outfit. His name was Charley White. "Come along and we will show you how to take the number of your claim. Your house stands in section 29, town 142, range 48, in the northeast quarter."

Gained Valuable Knowledge

Father was with them for two days and Sir! he could tell when he found a section stake in what direction it laid, as four sections always come together with their corners. This was valuable knowledge for these new settlers, who did not know a bit about those hieroglyphics that were cut deep in the wood of every section stake.

George Cooly was the head surveyor and had charge of the crew. Charley White came next, he was father's instructor in reading section stakes. When they left, Charley promised to send father a fine cane as soon as he got back to St. Paul late in the fall.

When they left the settlers began to hunt up the section stakes to get the description of their claims. Father helped them. Now they could file anytime, but this was put off until the fall when their other work was finished.

Mr. Probstfield came over one day and wanted to hire a girl. Joraand, my sister, went with him. Later she worked for Adam Stein at Georgetown. He was German, too, same as Probstfield. Stein and his wife always talked German among themselves, so Joraand thought she had picked up some words, which she brought along home.

Stein had a very fine little cornfield close to his house, but the blackbirds were fierce and Adam was wild … here was some of the German she picked up, "*Diese fordnit swarsa folger eser mein korn rein up*" (The damn blackbirds eat my corn clear up!)

Historic Lafayette

In 1920, Ole Midgarden and I went down to a place where Ole and Halvor worked in 1870 to see the old historical place, called Lafayette. It was the big bend of the river, opposite where the Sheyenne River enters the Red River. Here is where the first steamboat was built in 1856. The machinery and boiler were hauled from St. Cloud by wagons. We found the very spot the boat was built. It was a low but level river bank and easy to get boats into the river.

Ole told about when he worked for Jessy Wilson in the summer of 1870, putting up hay. Sometimes Jessy took a notion to go duck hunting and as he ws short of a water spaniel, he took Ole along to wade out in the slough to get the ducks. Sometimes he had to wade in up to his arms, but he never failed to bring in the duck.

He was a young chap of about 21 years and he got lots of thrills out of it. W. J. Bodkin was along hunting also.

Ole Anderson and Tarjei Muhle were sent back to Alexandria with oxen to get supplies. Flour was the principal thing. We could buy it at the Hudson Bay post at Georgetown, only 16 miles away, but it cost $14 a barrel.

Cattle Become Lost

A panic came. Our cattle got lost. Sister Thone and I on horseback had been hunting all over for the cows, but came home in the evening without them. Nothing serious was thought of this and we could find them in the morning. We were out the biggest part of the forenoon, but no cows. Then father started out but he also came home in the evening discouraged.

With the cows away, a food panic was started. We all hunted again the next day. We went a long ways but came home at night without them. The third day, father made up his mind to go from bend to bend on the Buffalo clear to Georgetown and inquire. Nobody had seen the cattle. Neither had they at Probstfield's.

So he made up his mind he would hunt the Red River woods clear to Georgetown. He was supplied with something to eat and he had a shot gun along. It did not take long before he got into the jungles, here was a lot of underbrush, young poplars, hazelbrush, and occasionally big oak trees and windfalls. Awful hard to get through, but he kept on moving northwards. After a long and troublesome travel, he decided to go out on the prairie again, but found that he could not cross the big slough. There was lots of wild rice and a soft bottom to it. He finally got across and reached home late at night, without the cows.

Next morning he told about his journey and his travels. He was sure there were a thousand acres of timber in one bunch. But many years later I have gone over this enclosed stretch of land and timber and there are about 4,000 acres.

Serious Loss

Father took a rest the next day, mother and he felt very blue and helpless, as a bunch of cattle with many good milk cows and calves means a whole lot to a new settler. It means milk, butter, cream, and beef.

The eighth day the cows were lost, father made up his mind that he would follow the Buffalo River all along the bends northward. And Sir! coming far north as the bend, where Salve Snartland now lives, he found the cows! All of them in one bunch, close to the river opposite where the schoolhouse now stands. Here they apparently had been all the time they had been away, by the looks of the grass. I want to impress you that here was one happy man, my father, when he found the cows. The cows were happy, too, to see people, as they came right up to him. Mother and us children met father with the cows. What a jubilee! The food panic was over and the worry over the loss of the cattle.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, March 19, 1938

Settlers Get First Word of Uprising at Fort Garry

Levi Thortvedt describes how news of Indian rebellion of 1870 is received; Family faces starvation when travelers fail tor return.

Editor's Note: Herewith is the seventh installment of the late Levi Thortvedt's early history of the Red River Valley. Last week he described the arrival of new settlers, the coming of railroad surveyors and the frightening realization one day that their cattle had strayed away, lost for days and finally recovered, much to the joy of the pioneer family. In today's installment, Mr. Thortvedt describes how first news of the Indian uprising at Fort Garry (Winnipeg) was received in 1870, how the family fafced startvation when others who had traveled to Alexandria for food had failed to return, and the first experience with a Valley snowfall.

Things run on smoothly for a few days now until our flour supply was getting low. Finally one day the last of the flour was reached, from that mother made three biscuits. One for Thone, one for Signe, and one for me, with orders to live on this as long as we could. We each kept our biscuits somewhere in the house, but ran in every once in a while and took a bite. Thone and I found some dry grapevine leaves that we tried to eat and Sir! they were a little sweetish and we ate a few of them. We ran home and told mother that she did not have to worry about us starving, as there was plenty good eating in the woods.

Ole Anderson and Tarjei Muhle had been due from Alexandria one day so they could be expected home anytime with plenty of flour. And Sir! about 5 o'clock in the evening, the wagons were sighted out in the prairie to the west, about where the Gunderson schoolhouse now stands. When we were sure that it was them, it did not take long before I was in and found my half-eaten biscuit. These biscuits were oversized, about six inches around and three and a half inches high. I remember them well and they were awful good, too.

Guard Against Fires

The latter part of September, breaking around the house was done as a guard or protection from prairie fires. Well, I might explain how this was done. Plow about four furrows, first around the buildings and hay, from river bank to river bank. (I mean where the prairie quit and the slope towards the river started.) Then another four or five furrows were plowed about 50 feet outside of the first breaking. The strip in between was carefully burned.

The covers were now put on the wagons again and the oxen put on. Armed with grub-stakes and the correct descriptions and numbers of their claims, most of the men started for Alexandria. This was a two weeks journey with oxen. Just think of it, now we can do it in a day with a Ford. The trip was to get provisions for the winter and to file on their claims. Father, Ole Midgarden, Tarjei Muhle, Halvor Salveson and Ole Anderson went. Tarjei Muhle took home provisions for Uncle Aanon. He was sickly, had consumption.

I remember the morning they started. I watched the wagons till they faded away. I felt it would be a long time to wait until father returned.

Mother Clipped Sheep

Mother and we children got along well under the circumstances. Nothing of any consequence happened. Only mother was clipping sheep – we had 12 and these small things that had traveled from Houston County, the most southeastern county in the state, a little better than 400 miles.

When the two weeks were over, the wagons came back loaded with flour, salt, coffee, matches, tobacco, and also windows for the house. They had filed on their claims and gotten

their papers.

Now it was to prepare for winter. Father was in the woods most of the time, cutting and splitting rails; cutting crotches and stakes for fencing. I remember one day I was along with him, when he was cutting basswood to make boards from. So thick, big trees, as I have seen. I commenced to figure if we could find home again. It was hard for people to believe that there would be such fine timber on the Buffalo River.

It was getting late in the fall, a little ice on the river, when early one morning father and I started on a trip to buy potatoes. Father had found out that Jimmy Rice had them for sale. He lived where John Cornelison now lives. We took along some bed clothes for robes and left.

Tells of Uprising

About two miles south from Probstfield's a man was seen, far to the rear, drawing in on us. He was in an awful hurry, and walker swiftly. Catching up with us, father asked if he wanted a ride. He gave father a sharp look but got in. They started to talk and, finding that father was not a very dangerous man, he opened up and told us about the uprising at Fort Garry (Winnipeg). It is known as the "Real Rebellion" of 1870. He was a fugitive and probably Louis Real himself, though he did not say so.

We stopped at Ole Thomson's place for lunch. There was a hay stack close by and father took a handful of hay and gave it to the horses. He felt probably he should offer to pay for it. He asked, "How much?" "Twenty-five cents," Thompson said, just for a little pitch of hay! Father told us about this lots of times. The man who rode with us did not stop for dinner but went right on.

I had to go out to look at the Red River. I thought it was awful big, being used to the Buffalo. Little particles of ice were moving in the center of it.

A couple of half breed carts had come, when I got to our wagon and one of them took a Buffalo robe and shook it. Jim, our horse, got so scared that he came very near breaking his halter. It was the smell that scared him and he never got over it … whenever there was even a small tatter of Buffalo hide, he was up in the air.

Former Stage Driver

We got to Jimmy Rice's, about five miles south of Thompson's. He had been an old stage driver on the Red River Trail. The horses were put in and given plenty of hay. Then they got busy down in the cellar, filling potatoes. I don't remember how many bushels or how much they cost, but when they got through, it was dark. We stayed there overnight. Jimmy related lots of thrilling tales of his stage driving days. Father went to the wagon to get the big woolen blanket. It had been brought from Norway and was home spun. It was called a "*kjell*." And Sir! he discovered that it was lost. That was a bad one. It was mother's personal property and dear to the whole family.

The next morning after breakfast we started for home and Sir! coming to the big ravine near the corner of our land, lay the blanket. I will tell you there was a happy father.

Next day, we got potatoes on the table again. We had not eaten them since we left Houston County. The other two families got potatoes, too.

Things moved along smoothly. Pletny of prairie chickens – they came close to the stable and lighted on the tree tops. They were sometimes shot from a hole in the stable.

Elk, Fox, Wolves

Elks were seen off and on, but seldom. Red foxes, prairie wolves were seen often. One day there was some little excitement down in the hollow a ways from the house. A fight. Our big shepherd dog and a badger. Ole Anderson was the first one there, then father, then I. Ole was quite excited over it. He did not know what kind of animal it was. Sometimes it was

a wild cat, and then a bear. The biting of the dog over the neck did not seem to hurt it a bit. Finally the dog got him over the adboden. Then he did not last long. They got a better view of the thing and fther said, "*Ole, Dea en graveling hell sintox*" as this was the Norweigan name for it. Ole did not quite like this definition; it was too tame … Ole carried the badger down to the river bank and skinned it. There was always money to get for the furs at the Hudson Bay post at Georgetown.

It is getting closer and closer to winter and the house and the stables had to be made warm. There was lots of work preparing for winter. Hay had to be fenced in because the cattle, sheep, and horses were running at large, those days.

First Snowfall

It was November before the snow came and then we got about six inches. It was full winter, but it did not bother those pioneers, as they were well used to hardship. Wintry days, mother's spinning sheel was running every evening and Thone and Jorand carding the wool. Father was making ax handles, pipe heads, and wooden spoons. A pair of sleighs had to be made, but it did not take him long to make them good enough to haul wood, rails, and stuff. More snow came, knee deep on the prairies.Well now, skis had to be made in order to get around but that was nothing. He had an oak already spotted, ideal for making skis, dry and straight-grained. He tried them on the hill and they went fast. I got the fever and he had to make a smaller pair for me. The ski bands were made from young elm saplings, twisted like a rope. The ski making was in progress by the neighbors, too. It was agreed that the mail should be brought home once a week and to change off by turns.

There were six able-bodied men that changed off, that meant the same person stayed home six weeks before he had to go again.

The post office was at Georgetown, 17 miles away. And the skis made it easy on top of the deep snow. The Hudson Bay people inspected the skis with interest, something news. They had snow shoes made out of twigs and roots, but they were clumsy and heavy to navigate with in comparison to skis.

No Dunning Letters

We did not get much mail those days as it was too wild for dunning letters, which has been a nightmare for the farmers of the Red River Valley later. We got one or two letters every week from neighbors back in Houston county, and we also had a magazine called "*Ved Arnen*," published by B. Amunsen at Decorah, Iowa. This was quite sure to come every week and if it had not it could have been a calamity. I remember the romance or novel that was in this. It was called "*Prairiens hvide hest*" (the white horse of the prairie). It lasted all winter. It was a Mexican romance, full of thrills all the time. This peculiar horse was all white with black ears, elegantly built and the swiftest thing on the prairie; he was a wild Mexican mustang. The Mexican jays were deadly rivals in capturing this horse alive as there was a fine senorita mixed in it.

Old man Jenson came up once in a while for a chat. He always carried his gun in hopes of shooting a prairie chicken or a rabbit, as they did not have much to live from. One day he told us his sons had struck out east about 60 miles to get work on the railroad. This looked kind of tough for these young boys, but it was a case of compulsion. They went somewhere west of Detroit, where they got work.

Later they told us what they did with the first money they earned. They traveled to Georgetown and bought a sack of flour. This they divided in two sacks. They had some other groceries, and had to rest many times on the way home.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, March 26, 1938

First Christmas Among Buffalo Settlers Told

Birth of First White Child – Theodore Skrei – related in Thortvedt's Story; Tells of Meeting With James J. Hill

Editor's Note: Herewith is the eighth installment of the late Levi Thortvedt's early history of the Red River Valley. How the little group of settlers along the Buffalo River faced starvation when a food caravan from Alexandria was delayed in returning, how their cattle, lost for days, were finally recovered, and other inceidents of those days in 1870 were related last week. Today he describes the birth of the first white child along the Buffalo – Theodore Skrei; the first Christmas with its homemade candles, a sermon read from Martin Luther's book, and other quaint customs, and the meeting with two strangers, one of whom was later identified as James J. Hill.

Here is another thing which happened, which stays in my mind. On a Sunday father and I went along with Ole Anderson to tend to his traps. Coming as far as where the Great Northern railroad now crosses the Buffalo River, Ole found a big mink that was half eaten by a skunk. Now is when the circus began. Ole got raving mad. He jumped up and down on the ice and pulled his hair. Then again he took his ax and shopped on the trap and the mink. Father was laughing and I guess I smiled a little, too. (I don't know what impressed me.) Then father said, "How about the ax, Ole?" But Ole did not take the time to look at the ax. He chopped and danced for awhile, but this got tiresome, too, for Ole. He took his ax and whirled it as far as he could. Whne we came to the next trap, it was pulled out and we had to track the mink in the snow. We found that it had gotten tangled in the trap. He had no ax, with which to kill it, and he wouldn't shoot it with the shotgun as that would spoil the skin. He finally got it killed though.

First White Child Born

One night mother was called over to Skrei's to assist. One more was added to the settlement. It was the birth of Theodore H. Skrei December 15, 1870, the first white child born on the Buffalo River.

Winter passed along slowly, occasionally a lively snowstorm to break the monotony.

Uncle Aanon was getting weaker and weaker, in bed all the time. The boys, Ole Midgarden, Tarjei Muhle, Ole Anderson, and Gunder Anderson, got home a lot of wood for him. It was mostly dry willow and to cut and haul it was our sport.

Christmas was now near at hand. It was customary in those days among the Norwegians, to have a big stack of wood behind the stove for Christmas Eve. We children were busy getting this done.

Christmas Eve

Also on Christmas Eve, the greased lamps were set aside and the homemade candles lit. You old timers probably remember how they looked. We did not have a candle form (four tubes connected together in a square). But absent of this form, mother made them anyway. She did it in this manner: a straight stick was held between two chairs. On this stick were tied cotton rags which served as a wick. Sheep tallow was poured over this, and as soon as this first "pour" was hardened, a second one was poured in the same manner, until the candle had the proper thickness. A bread pan placed on the floor caught the tallow that happened to drop.

The whole family washed thoroughly and their best clothes were put on. A *Jule Salme* (Christmas Hymn) was sung at the Christmas supper table.

Christmas trees were not in use those days, and if they had been we would not have gotten one anyway. But it was customery to "shout in" the Juletide. Ole Anderson went outside and shot in the Christmas.

The horses, cattle and sheep got the best hay we could find also on that night.

Hymns, Sermon

Hymns were sung and the sermon read from Dr. Martin Luther's *Hus Postil* (Book of Sermons). Well a sermon was read by father every Sunday during the year for that matter and I had to stay in the house until it was read, too. We had a good Christmas and the New Year was at hand, the first in this new country.

1870 was an adventurous year for us. The most so since coming to America in 1861. That was also the year the Civil War broke out.

We now have 1871.

Day by day passed, mother spinning at evenings and father making ax-handles or some other wood work. One day in the latter part of Feebruary, there came a letter from father's brother, Bendick Gunderson, that he had sold his farm and would come here, too, together with Ole Lee, a younger brother. Both had families and a lot of others from Houston County were joining them in their westward trip. This was great news for us all. Father had written to Bendick by request about the land in the Red River Valley and that was enough. He came, this fish business was what took Bendick the most as he was a great lover of fish. The best in the world for him.

I had drawn the bends of the Buffalo River and sent it to Ovek, one of Bendick's boys of my own age. It was put in father's letter. Ovek recognized them when he came the next summer.

Strangers Come, Go

It was in the early part of April, 1871, two men came through our woods and crossed our bridge. They came to the house and asked if they could stay over night. Father told them we had no beds to spare but if they would sleep on the floor and eat what we have to offer, they certainly could stop. Sure, they said, and the horses were put in the stable and the robes carried into the house. When it was bed time father carried in some hay and put it on the floor for them to sleep on and as they had their own robes I believe they slept good.

These two men talked mostly among themselves, and I believe it was French as I could not understand it. I paid particular attention to one of them, as his face was full of holes which showed that he had had the smallpox. They left the next morning, nothing more was heard from them and we did not know who they were.

One was James J. Hill

How I found out that one of them was Jim Hill, was this way. As late as 1912 at the Grain Growers convention at Fargo, he was scheduled to speak and I wanted to see and hear him. He was known as the "Empire Builder."

He came to the platform of the Fargo auditorium and started to talk. After a while he said, "In the spring of 1870, I stopped with a homesteader over on the Buffalo river, and crossed over to the Red River." This proved to me that he was one of those gentlemen mentioned above.

Here is another extract from his speech: "The Red River Valley is the most wonderful country in the world. You can drive for 500 miles and not find a stone big enough to kill a canary bird. The farther north agricultural products are grown, the better they are, if they are matured."

Jim Hill was well traveled in the Valley even back in the early sixties.

A Great Surprise

It was snowing heavily on day about the middle of March, 1871, when somebody passed north of our house. Father looked through the half window and got a quick glance of a man. "H-mm, believe it is Hakji Heia," he told mother.

"*Hakji Heia, a du galen?* Mother remarked (meaning, are you crazy?) "How could he find us way out here?" Then at once a sharp rap on the door, and Sir! there he stood. "Good Day, Ola," he said, and came in pretty quick. This fellow called himself in English, Henry Simmon. He had been our neighbor in Houston county and had planned to go west with us, but somehow it did not materialize. He had made this expression to us just before we started west. "When you reach the Red River Valley I will be there ahead of you." But he had taken another course and had taken a claim in Lac Qui Parle county. He did not like it there and so followed us.

Hakji was a good talker and a lively character. Humoristic … I remember how he mocked the Indians in Lac Qui Parle county. How they pointed their fingers on Levi Stenerson's turned up moccasins – the toes stuck way up – and laughted and talked Indian. *"Wachicha-haska-chinchako, Ahanupa,"* meaning ha, ha ha, look at the long toes sticking up, ha, ha, ha.

The next day, he and father started out to look at the land. They went over on the other side of the river in the eastern portion of our woods, where there was a lot of fine oak timer. Hakji made the remark that it was like the pineries he had seen at Black River Falls, Wisconsin. He was an old lumberjack.

Worked as Freighter

The third day we left for Georgetown to see if he could get work for the Hudson Bay company. We found out later that he did, freighting between Fort Gary and St. Cloud. He settled on a claim near where Neilsville, Minnesota, no is. He visited us again.

A kind of panic set in. Trying days for the new settlers. Uncle Aanon was gradually sinking, was out of his head once in a while and the men folks of the neighborhood took turns to sit with his bed. They had to be two men every night to hold down. It was hard for his wife, Thone, with four small children – one fo them hanging to her skirt crying a lot of the time.

We were now out of hay, but luckily Tarjei had some which he let us have. The cows had to have it and the horses did not get a spear, but they were plucky. They went out on the prairie and pawed off some snow, filling up on dead grass. There was a lot of wild wormwood and this seemed to still hold its strength. Father cut down some big elm trees to let them chew and eat the buds. Father cut himself one day while he was doing that and was laid up for awhile.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, April 2, 1938

Settlers Break Ground with Crude Implements

Homemade plows, drags, prepare soil for seedling; Thortvedt tells of arrival of More New Settlers seeking Fertile Lands.

Editor's Note: Below is the ninth installment of the historical account of the early day Red River Valley by the late Levi Thortvedt. Previous accounts have told of the overland trek from Houston County, Minn., in 1870 and the many experiences of the settlers who found land to their liking along the banks of the Buffalo River east of Moorhead. Last week the birth of the first white child among the settlers was described, and the first Christmas spent in the crude log cabin amid quaint ceremonies. Today he tells of the start of extensive farming operations on the virgin sod, using homemade drags and plows, and the arrival of more new settlers, vanguard of the hundreds who were to travel to this fertile area.

On March 25, Aanon Gjeitsta died. Had to be buried and no lumber to make a coffin from. So father had to take boards from his wagon box. April 1 he was buried on the river bank near the line between father's and Aanon's land. I remember it well – the river was high – it was snowing again very heavily – it was a sad time.

A couple of hymns were sung from Gyleberg's Hymn Book and the little funeral party parted for their homes. This was the first funeral service on the Buffalo River.

Levi Steenerson Comes

Levi Steenerson had heard about the land on the Buffalo from Hakjei Hei (Henry Simmons). He left his home in Yellow Medicine County, where he had taken a claim in 1870. He reached Halvor Salveson's homestead first, tired hungry, and wet. He was cheered to meet these old acquaintances, Halvor and Ola Midgarden, who worked for him. First, he asked for something to eat and Sir! it did not take long before a good meal was ready: salt pork, bread, butter, and black coffee. Coffee could be bought at the Hudson Bay post.

The next day he came to our place. I remember well how he looked in his gray pepper and salt suit with plenty of air holes in it, but he got his clothes patched up in good shape before he went farther.

He liked the land awfully good up here and wanted to settle down, but he wanted to get a job somewhere for a while first. He also went to the Hudson Bay Company where Hakjei Hei (Henry Simmons) worked and he also got the same kind of job between Winnipeg and St. Cloud. This is the way the great Sandhill River country was found and Steenerson had the honor of opening it for settling. He took a claim right west of where Climax now is, not far from Hakji's at Neilsville.

Prepare to Break Land

Our little ten acre "breaking" is now commencing to dry up and preparations for field work was now in mind. The drag was about ready; made from split and squared oak and iron rods. The rods had been bought in Alexandria last fall. When it was ready, father was quite proud of his little drag.

Tarjei Skrei's was made of wood, teeth and all. The drag was the only implement we had and Sir! it took many draggings over the tough prairie sod before it was fit to sow. No sseders or drills in the country. Father sowed the wheat by hand, and I was asked to walk at the edge of where the wheat appeared. It was called "*Gange I saakasti*" in Norwegian.

When sowed, it was my job to stay in the field to keep the blackbirds off till father had it dragged.

Was County Treasurer

One of these men was Hans Strate, who later became County Treasurer of Clay County and was well known by all taxpayers. When he left he forget his bundle and mother sent me after him with it. He thanked me and gave me a tintype picture of himself, which I have in my hand while writing this.

After seeding was done, we fenced about 70 acres of land. The springtime passed on nicely. Thone and I got our old job back to furnish fish for the family.

These good old pioneer days were happy for us all. Wherever they came together, it was joshing and humor all of the time, in spite of all the hardships they had to go through once in a while. It is funny with a new country! Tracks of land in its wild state. A sublime feeling every step you take is on virgin soil, brilliantly decorated with wild flowers. You get the idea this is a brand new world, but fully developed.

Earth Reveals Age

However, my idea about the youngness of the earth has greatly changed later in my life. Traveling in the mountains and rocky country the big rocks in themselves representatives of old, old age; water channels and river s having dug their channels themselves through the ages of time.

More Settlers Are Coming

Father got a letter from his brother Bendick saying that he and "*Lisla Ole*" (Little Ole) as he was called because he was younger than my father, was "*Store Ole*" (Big Ole) with a lot of others and their families had just started on their journey to the Red River Valley. Bendick sent letters off and on from different towns as it was understood that father was to meet them to make it easier to find the Buffalo country. When we heard from them at Alexandria we knew it was time for us to start out.

The next morning father and I started. We drove on south at a dog trot and we met the party 25 miles south of Georgetown. It did not take long before cousin Ovel and I met. Father took the lead and soon we were home again and a hearty handshaking followed. Ovel and I wasted no time but ran to the river for a swim. I was first in to show him that I had learned to swim. He hesitated for a while as he had never had a swim in his life, but jumped in.

Many in Party

In this party were Bendick Gunerson and his wife, Anna; children, gunder, Joraand, Ovel, Andreas, Olaus and Andrew. That waas all the children they had then, but later Sina and Ola were born. Father's mother, "Gamle Joraand" and his brother Ole, wife Asjar and their children Gustave, Julia, Olaus, and later Andrew were born.

Others in the party were: Vetle Lisland and his wife, Gunhild, and their children Gonlaug, Guro, Aanon, Kjetil, and Gunhild. Gunder Svenkeson and his wife, signe and their children: Caroline, and Gunild, and later more were added to this family namely, Maren, Villa, Helene, Thea, Svenke, and Willie. Gunleik and his wife, Gunover; Talef Nelson and his wife Sigri. There were four single men also Gunder Lee, Ole Aanison Midgarden, Aani Breiland and Tarjei Brevik.

Gunleik Spokeli and Tallef Nelson left their wives with us and went to Neilsville to look for land.

Something disagreeable had happened. The claim faher had planned for Bendick had been taken by Knut Melaas, who had built a little round 2 by 4 hut. They came to the place and Knute was busy with the house. Bendick got stuck on this cozy claim and offered Knute $100 in bills right there if he would sell his right. He accepted the offer at once, as a hundred dollars was quite a bit of money in those days. Knute with the cash in his pocket started off

at once.

Both Bendick and father felt good after this deal as they would now be close neighbors again. Bendick crossed the little bridge with all his belongings and was soon located in his new home.

In the meantime, the rest of the party had found claims farther down the river on the east side.

Others Arrive

A few days later another group of settlers came from Houston County. Gunder Muhle and his wife, Ingebor, with their three sons, Ola, Chester, Little Ola, and a sister, Kari. They settled in Moland.

Then there was Knute Juve, a widower with a son, Ola, and a daughter, Sigri; then Margit Omonson, a widow with two sons. Ola, Thor, and two girls, Anne and Ingebor. They stayed with us over winter, then moved to Climax, where they took up claims.

Things were now progressing rapidly and the new settlers were well satisfied, but theyre was one great menace and that was the unforgivable mosquito. Smudges had to be built every night on account of the cattle and horses. Making a smudge was quite a task, as there was no straw or manure to cover up the fire with, and they had to cut green grass and this was tiresome after a long, hard day's work.

Later in the summer another group of settlers came. They came from the eastern part of Fillmore County and were partly acquainted with the rest of the settlers on the Buffalo River. They were the brothers, Gjermund, Ole, and Tarjei Storasli, Kjetil Aasen and Knute Tveten,

All from Norway

Now we had quite a settlement, and the funny part of it was that all of the settlers had emigrated from the same district in old Norway. My father suggested that this township be called Moland after Moland prestegjeld (parish), Fyresdal, Norway. This name was unanimously accepted.

Later in the summer John Danielson and John Norman arrived on foot. They had been working on the Northern Pacific railroad near Audobon, Minnesota. I remember when father asked what their names were that John Danielson answered, "I am John Danielson, *pengelos*." (meant I have no money)

They questioned father about vacant claims and he told them about a quarter section left in section 18. They had a free dinner and then went to look at it. John Danielson took it and went back to the railroad camp to get his woman, Johanna. They stayed with old man Weum for a few days til they got their sod house up.

The emigration into this valley started in earnest in 1874. From one up to 10 covered wagons in each bunch of new settlers. About 20 of these covered wagon trains could be seen in one day. They came mostly from southeastern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, and kept on from May 'til late in September.

This invasion of settlers was the greatest in number per year of any given area of approximately the same number of square miles in the United States.

When the Northern Pacific surveyors came, two more lines were marked. One of them crossed the Buffalo and the stakes went across our field and pointed across the prairie to hit the Red River at Probstfield's. They had their camp near Bendick's place. This place was called Cross Camp, meaning that the railroad would cross there. The other camp was near the place where Tarjei Storasli was in the operation of building his house.

These people bought butter, milk, and eggs from us and we could buy sugar, coffee, and tobacco from them and Sir! things looked pretty lively on the Buffalo.

None of these lines surveyed were used, but the one located by Martin Wells, about

30 rods north of where the NP Railroad crosses the South Buffalo. I had an idea that the railroad was coming from the south and thus would pass our house about half a mile to the west. What a delight that would be to see the powerful locomotive with great volumes of smoke coming out of the proud looking “V” shaped smokestacks. There was nothing I loved so much in my boyhood days as a locomotive.

Moorhead Daily News
Saturday, April 9, 1938

N.P. Reaches Red River; Settlers Harvest Crop

Gamblers follow railroad; threshing with crude implements; the first Prairie fire; sourge of Grasshoppers told by Levi Thortvedt.

Editor's Note: Here is the 10th and final installment of the historical review of life among the early settlers of the Red River Valley, written by the late Levi Thortvedt. The long overland trek by covered wagon and ox team from Houston County, Minnesota, to the banks of the Buffalo river in 1870; the hardships encountered by this pioneer band; birth and death among the settlers; the breaking of virgin soil; the coming of railroad surveyors and other mileposts of progress have been recounted previously. Mr. Thortvedt describes the arrival of gamblers following the railroad; the first harvest and threshing with crude implements; the cry of "Prairie Fire;" arrival of Northern Pacific Railroad at the banks of the Red River; the coming of ministers to round out the community life; and the first grasshopper scourge.

Our bridge was the only one over the Buffalo River with the exception of the one at Georgetown. A lot of traffic started. Vehicles of every description were seen; covered wagons, single wagons, buggies and ox carts.

I spent a lot of my time at the bridge watching this traffic. I remember one day a well dressed couple came along … had one horse on a single buggy. One of them asked me how they could water the horse. "I will run up and get a pail," I said. I filled he pail and watered the horse and Sir! to my surprise, one of them took up a satchel. It was nearly filled with silver dollars. He took out one and handed it to me. I shook my head and said I did not want anything for that, and I have no change, anyway. He said "Take the dollar, it is alright." I took it and Oh! But I felt rich. That satchel full of dollars was a wonderful sight to me. I told my father about it and he said they must have been gamblers, that follow the construction of railroads. After that I always had a pail ahndy down by the bridge to water the horses.

Stage Line

A little stage line was in operation between Tent Town (Probstfield's) and Oak Lake (now Lake Park), which was the terminal for the railroad at that time. This made it handy for us as we could send for sugar, coffee, and tobacco, but for the heavier freight, like flour and salt, they drove to Oak Lake with oxen. The distance was about 30 miles and it took two days. There was hardly any road at all, up hill, down hill, and soft places in between.

Things progressed rapidly, breaking plows were dragged across the prairie from one settler to another as they did not all have them. It was perhaps the busiest implement among the new settlers.

Our first crop was cut by a cradle. A peculiar looking implement with a long big blade or scythe, only longer and broader. It had five fingers, nearly as long as the cutting blade, getting shorter and shorted upwards with cutting, to catch the grain. It was of sufficient width to hold the grain until laid on the field. And Sir! the unbound grain looked like a three foot ribbon-lying alongside the swath.

The fingers of the cradle were about on ein ch in the center and tapered off to a sharp point at the outer edge. They were braced to the handle by long tiny pins about an inch in diameter. It was claimed that rel good men swinging it, could cut four acres a day. Father did the cradling and mother the raking and binding.

Grain Carefully Shocked

Towards evening, mother went home to prepare the supper but father stayed in the field till the day's work was shocked. Every shock was carefully capped with two bundles. I again had the job to scare the blackbirds away, and they were numerous at times. When it was dry, it was hauled home to our yard and set up in a nice little stack.

Well, what about threshing? No machine within 140 miles. Well we will find out right now. Late in the fall when the river was frozen solid, the snow was sept from the ice and the flail was made ready. The wheat was hauled to the river a little at a time. The bundles were laid in a row with the heads inward and threshed thoroughly with the flail. A flail has a long handle resembling that of a fork, only straight, and at the end of this is fastened a shorter but heavier stick, about 2 ½ feet long, fastened to each other by means of a rawhide string to test the flexibility.

When it was threshed out, the straw was taken away so there was only the wheat and the chaff left on the ice. A dust pan was used to scoop it up and throw it against the wind. The wheat was heavier so went farther than the chaff, and thus was separated. I remember when my father picke dup the first handful of wheat thus threshed. He exclaimed, "Oh! Look at that wheat@ Look at the big plump kernels."

Worked for Railroad

When the fall work was done many of the married men left to get work on the railroad, which was coming closer and closer. This came in very handy for the settlers, with families and very little money to get over the approaching winter.

Well we will now go back to the early fall of 1871. Tent Town (Probstfield's) had been moved four miles farther south to the old Burbank hotel. This house was now occupied by an old man by the name of Job Smith. He sold it to the Puget Sound Land Company, as it was then known, but it was in reality the Northern Pacific Railroad Company that bought it through their agent, Andrew Holes. Price we hear later was two thousand dollars.

This was the beginning of Moorhead. It was not certain that the failroad would cross at this place. The next question was what will the town be called? We heard many different names before Moorhead was decided upon. We did not like this name very well. What was its meaning? We called it "*Mere Hoved*," meaning more heads, in Telemarking josh. This name was used for a long time by the Norwegians talking amongst themselves.

There was now erected some tent stores. The goods were brought here by teams of freighters and the prices were comparatively high.

Prairie Fire

The prairie grass was dry. I remember one day, the wind was blowing hard from the south when we saw great clouds of smoke. Only mother, Thone, Signe and I were at home. Then mother told us, "This looks awful! You better run over to Skrei's to see what you can do." Mrs. Skrei, her three year old daughter and baby Theodore were the only ones at home there, too. We took along each a fork and a couple of sacks and ran. The fire was coming with terrific force and here were the hay stacks house and the stable unprotected by breaking. We fought all we could and Sir! it looked at one time that everything would burn. Then my sister, Thone, thought of the mop. She ran and got it and a pail of water and Mrs. Skrei was along helping all she could, but the baby was crying in the house so it was a hard trial. The mop in the hands of Thone did wonders, and the force of the first gradually dampened down and the house was saved. There are not many people in Clay County that can imagine the volume of the smoke or the flames driven by a hard wind. I have been the flames 20 feet high.

Timber for Bridge

One day a bridge conractor from the railroad came down here. He watned to buy oak logs for piling the bridge across the South Buffalo. Father did not dare sell any timber because he had seen in the Homestead Law that a homesteader was not allowed to sell any until he had proved up his land, but they had seen the fine oak timber on the other side of the river and insisted hard to buy the stuff. Then father old them that if they wanted to take some he couldn't help it, and Sir! the next day there were a lot of choppers, teams, and wagons. Sometimes the logs were hung on the axle and sometimes loaded on top.

They kep on a few days until father stopped them. They again offered money but he refused. He was afraid there might be a spy among them who would prove that he had sold timber from his unproved claim. Here you can see an example from these people how afraid they were to do anything against the law.

So they went over to "Thone has Aanon's" as we called her (Uncle Aanon's widow). She had a lot of fine timber and they got enough to complete the bridge and they gave her $50 in greenbacks for it. She could not stand the temptation and took the money, which was awful helpful to the poor widow.

NP Reaches the Red

The road bed was now ready from the hills to the south branch of the buffalo and the bridge being constructed, the work was started westward to Moorhead.

Moorhead was just a tent town, but things moved around pretty lively. It did not take long before the NP had a depot and warehouse up, and other frame buildings sprang up rapidly.

Bramble House was at that time a very noted building, it stood on the Key City corner of Front Street (now Center Avenue) and Fourth Street. The Bruns and Finkle store stood where the Allan hotel now is, corner of Fourth street and First Avenue North. This was the chief trading place, it was a long dark one story building. They had a good supply of most everything a new settler needed and bought what we had to sell, as muskrat skins, mink, coon and other furs.

The Douglas Hardware store stood on the opposite corner of the Bramble House, wehre a show shop now stands.

John Erickson started a hotel and saloon, where the printing office now is on Front Street … a fine view of the Red River and the steamboats could be seen … a very lively place those days.

Great Convenience

It was a great convenience for the settlers in Moorehad when the railroad got this far and also for the settlers on the Buffalo, only 10 miles away. A trip to town could be made in one day with oxen.

Alexandria did not have a railroad, either. They had to haul their freight from St. Cloud, a distance of 60 miles, which made the goods higher in Alexandria, too.

There was considerable worry among the settlers if there would ever come any ministers way out here. Some made the statement that they never would come, but father was more optimistic and said, "Oh, just wait a while and there will be plenty of them."

Early in the forenoon, one day, one of those that had made the statement came half running through the woods to the blacksmith shop where father was working.

"Ola!" he exclaimed. "I believe I have to move my house into the woods, the ministers are treading my nose off."

Plenty of Ministers

"What do you say?" asked father. "Wa it not you who said that ministers would never come out here?" The other one answered, "Well, there are plenty of them now."

This man had his house whitewashed on the outside and when the ministers reached the top of Muskado hills, they could see his house, the only one visible for about 14 miles. They traveled by foot from the head of the NP railroad.

The first clergyman was a young student by name of Bord Larson Hagbe, just turned out by the Augsburg Seminary of Minneapolis. He succeeded in organizing a little congregation in the Red River Valley. The meetings were held in the farm houses as there were no churches or schoolhouses.

The first to be confirmed was my sister, Thone, and cousin, Joraand Bendickson. Then Guro Lisland, Aanon Lisland and Chester G. Muhle. This minister read with the "*Konformanter*" (confirmation class) the day before a meeting or the one after; just how it happened to be the most convenient.

Gamblers Follow Railroad

The railroad got into Moorhead late in 1871, and with it came all the gamblers that had followed it all the way. The bridge over the river was built in the winter of 1871-1872.

Nothing of great importance happened until in 1873, the grasshopper ravages in Minnesota came here one Saturday eve.

We had a little barley field. In the morning, all heads of barley were lying on the ground, chopped off at the neck. In the daytime, in the sunshine, you could see grasshoppers close to the sun, in an awful height. If you should travel against the wind, the grasshoppers would pelt you in the face. The river was floating with them, like when the leaves are shedding in the fall so thick. They stopped and laid their eggs in the outskirts of the little fields, then apparently waited for the northwest wind.