

What They Said About Wisconsin

Henry David Thoreau, from his field notebook:

[May 24, 1861, while on the steamboat Itasca, riding up the Mississippi River]

Up river. River say 60 rds wide – or $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 mile between bluffs – broad flooded low intervals covered with willows in bloom (20 feet high rather slender) & prob. other kinds – & elms & white maple & cottonwood.—

now boatable between the trees & prob. many ducks there.

Bluffs say 150 to 200 ft. high.

Rarely room for a village at base of cliffs. Oaks on top (white?)

ash – elm – aspen – bass on slope & by shore.

Kingfishers – small ducks – swallows – jay &c

Land on the shore often with a plank.

Great rafts of boards & shingles 4 or 5 rods wide & 15 or 20 long.

Very few small boats. Holes in side of hill at Cassville where lead dug.

Occasionally a little lonely house on a flat or slope – often deserted –

banks in primitive condition bet. the towns which is almost everywhere.

Load some 9 or 10 cords of wood at a landing – 20 men In 10 minutes – disturb a bat which flies aboard.

Willow shown floating horizontally across the river. Low islands occasionally.

Macgregor a new town op. to Prairie du Chien – the smartest town on the river – exports the most wheat of any town bet. St. Paul & St. Louis.

wheat in sacks great heaps at P. du Chien – covered at night & all over the ground & the only bread wheat

[June 27, 1861, while riding with the Milwaukee & Prairie du Chien Railroad]

– by cars to Milwaukee

1st 60 miles up the Valley of the Wisconsin – which looked broad & shallow

bluffs 2 or 3 miles apart – Great abundance of tall spiderwort – also red lilly – rudbeckia

– blue flag white & yel. lilly & whitewater ranunculus –

Abundance of Mullein in Wisconsin.

Madison – capital --- & its 4 lakes –



Horace Mann, Jr., from a letter to his mother dated June 27, 1861:

As I am writing while the cars are going, I cannot do it up very well, but I will try to make it readable.

We left Red Wing yesterday at about 2 P.M. on the Steamer War Eagle and arrived in Prarie du Chien [sic] at 8 A.M. to-day. The train for Milwaukee did not leave till 10 o'clock so we had to wait a while. It is rather cooler to-day than we have had for some time so it is very comfortable travelling. We passed through Madison at 1:30 P.M. and shall arrive in Milwaukee at 6 o'clock this evening. If we can find a boat going to Mackinaw we shall take it immediately, if not, we shall wait till one does go, which will be in the course of a day anyhow, I suppose. There has been a riot in Milwaukee of which I suppose you have read long before this, but the Milwaukee paper says to-day that the city is quiet. (Stopping at Whitewater.)

For the first 60 or 70 miles of travel to-day we kept in the valley of the Wisconsin River, which we crossed three times. It is a broad, very shallow river, with a sandy bottom; full of sand bars, many of which are bare at low water as in the case now. The praries [sic] in the river bottom where they were not cultivated were covered with flowers, among which were the Spiderwort, the wild tiger lily, the yellow Puccoon, &c. The marshy ponds are full of white lilies in bloom. We have not come through any large praries [sic] today, it being mostly marshy meadows for the low ground and oak openings for the higher ground. The redwing blackbird is the most common bird there is all along the track in the marshes.

You may think that I can write better, but I cannot, for this is one of the roughest roads I ever rode over. Madison is a very pretty place I should think and the lakes which surround it (stopping at Palmyra) are very beautiful. The state house is a large building standing on a rise of ground near the track as we enter the city; it is built out of dark cream colored limestone, which can be quarried all over that section of the state. I have nothing more to say now so Goodbye.

From your loving son
Horace Mann

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