

Chapter 1

History

WE RECENTLY ENDURED A PERIOD of mass hysteria, or at least widespread silliness, when the odometer of the Gregorian calendar rolled over from 1999 to 2000. The more paranoid people in our society bought all sorts of “survival” food and equipment in order to be prepared for the disaster that was surely going to strike as computers went haywire, planes fell from the sky, electricity service was interrupted, cash machines stopped working and all other manner of modern conveniences screeched to a halt. I limited my Y2K preparations to buying eight extra batteries for our flashlight. At the rate we use flashlight batteries, our night vision is assured for the next five years. Having grown up on a farm and having many friends in childhood who did not have running water in their homes, I couldn’t get too excited about the unlikely temporary loss of a few conveniences. Self-reliance and independence were basic values that I saw all around me as a child. My sense of what people can do without has been strengthened over the past few years as I have researched the westward migration of my ancestors across the prairies of the United States. With that in mind, I realized that virtually none of the “dangers” being feared by the Year 2000 Paranoids would have had any impact on our ancestors as we moved from 1899 to 1900. I don’t think the horses and cattle knew the difference. The steam engines that powered the nation’s train and industrial systems didn’t have any computer chips embedded in their mechanics. Everyone, at least on a farm, raised their own food and stored it away for the winter. Fuel for heating and cooking generally came from wood, coal or buffalo chips. People made their own clothes, often from recycled flour sacks. Students, when schooled at all, were tutored by one brave schoolmarm in a one-room schoolhouse. And, as we have all heard at some point from an ancestor, the little students walked five miles to school every day, barefoot, in the snow, all uphill, in both directions!

Although the title of this chapter is History, that implies something far, far beyond the scope of this book or the capabilities of the author. Instead, this will be a brief

primer or review of basic American history with the focus on the events and technological developments of most significance in the lives of the people whose biographies are included herein.

The primary period being covered by this book is from 1800 to 1940. That means we begin our story in the context of Thomas Jefferson’s presidency and the Lewis and Clark exploration of the newly purchased Louisiana Territory. A fascinating account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is given in historian Stephen E. Ambrose’s 1996 book *Undaunted Courage*. One observation he makes has to do with the perception of distance and speed:

...it seemed unlikely that one nation could govern an entire continent. The distances were just too great. A critical fact in the world of 1801 was that nothing moved faster than the speed of a horse. No human being, no manufactured item, no bushel of wheat, no side of beef (or any beef on the hoof, for that matter), no letter, no information, no idea, order or instruction of any kind moved faster. Nothing ever had moved any faster, and, as far as Jefferson’s contemporaries were able to tell, nothing ever would.¹

Reflect on that passage for a moment. Think about it. The steam engine was still in development and had not been applied to steamboats or train engines; the telegraph did not exist yet. Anything ANYTHING, that needed to be moved from one place to another had to be carried by human or animal, or a human on an animal. And that included information and ideas. Without the telegraph or any other electric or electronic devices, information had to be relayed from person to person or by carrying information written on paper. This assertion should be qualified with a few notes. Information could be carried faster by a carrier pigeon, but they were the “high tech” weapons of the military at the time and not generally

¹ *Undaunted Courage*, page 52

owned by the public. And, Native Americans had easily recognized that light carries faster and farther than sound and had devised a system of smoke signals in regions where the terrain enabled visibility over long distances. But, if you lived in a forested area and you didn't have your own carrier pigeons, information was going to be very slow in getting to you. There were no recording devices for voice or photograph. The only people who ever heard a President speak were those who were in the same room with him or at the front of a public appearance by the President.

The population of the United States in 1801 was just over 5 million people and nearly one million of those were Slaves. By 1860 the population of the United States was roughly 30 million. In contrast, the 2000 Census reported the population at over 280 million people.

The Pony Express began in 1860, making it possible to deliver a letter from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in an amazing 10 days.

The first transcontinental telegraph line was completed in 1861, linking Washington, D.C. with San Francisco, California.

The Homestead Act was signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862 making it possible for a family to acquire 160 acres for free by living on the land for five years and improving it.

The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869. The railroads were given sections of land by the U.S. Government and these were then sold to settlers. Emigrant Aid companies were set up in the East to encourage settlers to move to the newly opened lands in the West. Recruiters even went to Europe to encourage farming families to migrate to the Dakotas and other prairie lands. This 1880's poster from the Chicago and North Western Railroad was typical.

****More to be added in the areas of technology and medical advances and other history relevant to telling the stories.

Continued topics of Transportation:

Basic U.S. History of expansion and acquisition: (or *Things you would have learned in school if you had been paying attention.*)

Frontiersmen: Daniel Boone, Lewis & Clark

Illnesses and Medicine:

Wars and the military:

2 PRAIRIE QUEENS

Women's rights and suffrage:

Development of communications:

Farming techniques and equipment:

2,000,000 FARMS of Fertile Prairie Lands
to be had Free of Cost

CENTRAL DAKOTA

The United States offers as a Gift Two Million Farms to Two Million Families who will occupy and improve them. These Lands lie between the 45th and 48th degrees of latitude, and between Minnesota and the Missouri River. In this belt is about

30 Millions OF Acres
Of the Most Productive Grain Lands in the World. The attached Map shows the Location of these Lands.

THIS MAP SHOWS THE ROUTE
to the best lands in the
Chicago & North-Western R'y
from Chicago to the West. It shows the
"FREE" LAND OFFERT OF CENTRAL DAKOTA.

YOU NEED A FARM!
Here is one you can get simply by occupying it. It will be noticed that

CHICAGO AND NORTHWESTERN

Has Two Lines of Road that run through to those Lands. It is the only Rail Road that reaches them.
In the Division to the West, North and South of Watertown, are many millions of acres that you can reach by the CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY. Along the Line in Dakota have been laid out a number of Tracts in which are needed the Merchant, Mechanic and Laborer.
CENTRAL DAKOTA is now, for the first time, open to settlement. The Indians have been removed and their reservations offered to those who wish to occupy them.

HOW TO GET THERE
Any Ticket Agent should be able to sell you Tickets via the CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY, by TRACY or HANNAH, Minnesota, or to WATERTOWN, Dakota. If there you can get Tickets to all Stations West on the Line to Dakota. From Watertown, or from any Station West of Marshall, you can get accommodations that will take you to the Lands West, South or North of the Lake Superior line of the Railroad. All Agents of the CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY can sell you Tickets to these Lands.

AT CHICAGO YOU CAN BUY TICKETS AT
62 CLARK STREET; 75 CANAL STREET, Corner of Madison; at the WELLS STREET DEPOT, on Kinzie Street, north of Wells Street Bridge; and at KINZIE STREET DEPOT, on the Corner of Kinzie and Canal Streets.

BEAR IN MIND You can not get to the Lands by Rail Road, unless you go via the

Chicago & North-Western R'y.

John Ashcroft & Co. Printers, Chicago.