

A Case Study in Evaluating Sources for Local History

Contributed by HERBERT A. KELLAR

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

FOR the past 3 years the State Historical Society of Wisconsin has held an annual 2- or 3-day Institute on Local History, designed to aid officials and members of county and local historical agencies, other workers in local history, and teachers and to provide them with the latest and best information for their activities. The institute also provides a valuable service by bringing the State society and the local historical agencies in the State into a close relationship in function and performance. The attendance at the 1953 institute was approximately 200. On the first day the local historical societies reported their activities; on the second day the State society presented a case study of a sample project in which a local society might engage. The public is invited to the institute and invited to take part in its sessions.

This article is in the main taken from the mimeographed "Proceedings of the Institute on Local History at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, August 28 and 29, 1953." The panel discussions reported are those of the sessions of August 29. Members of the panel in the morning session were Herbert A. Kellar (chairman) and Lucile Kellar, respectively coordinator and assistant coordinator of the McCormick collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; and the following other members of the staff of the State society: Alice E. Smith, head of the research division; Harry Lichter, collections curator, museum division; Ken Duckett, assistant in the manuscript division; and George Waller, chief of the American history research center. Also on the panel were Lawrence Gara, University of Mexico, Mexico; and Susan Reed Stifler, business historian. In the afternoon session the two last named were replaced by Livia Appel, chief of the publication division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; and Lillian Krueger, editor of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*.

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION, 10 A.M.

Mr. Kellar distributed a mimeographed statement containing sample source materials available for a study of the imaginary XYZ Plow Company and its

founder, Peter Edward Nye, who had originally gone to La Crosse from Worcester, Mass. These consisted of an extended obituary notice about Mr. Nye, which appeared in a newspaper at the time of his death in 1910; an extract from a county history, which pertained to the history of the plow company from 1910 to 1924, when the company failed in business; and an extract from a diary written by Mr. Nye.¹

Of these the obituary article called attention to the growth of the XYZ Plow Company in La Crosse and how important it had become in the lives of its citizens. It stressed the aggressive leadership of Peter Edward Nye ("Old Pen," as he was called) in the affairs of the company, indicated in part by the improvements he introduced in the plow business. He was one of the first to substitute steam for horse power and at the time of his death was experimenting successfully with internal-combustion-engine power. His enterprise further led to the development of an extensive foreign business. A leader in civic affairs, he would be missed both as a friend and as a good citizen. The extract from the county history, which covered the story of the XYZ Plow Company after Mr. Nye's time, revealed that Nye's successors lacked his ability to keep up with or ahead of technological advances. Because of failure to develop a successful small tractor to operate the plows made by the company, its products would no longer sell; and, 15 years after Mr. Nye's death, the company ceased to exist. The extract from Mr. Nye's diary is reproduced at the end of this article.

Mr. Kellar noted that in the theoretical case before the institute, all the plow company records and those pertaining to Nye had been transferred from the old "Castle" of the Nye family to the Nye wing of the La Crosse Public Library. The Agricultural and Mechanical Society of La Crosse had been asked to investigate the possibility of preparing a history of the company from the available records. Members of the society were now reporting as members of a panel before the institute.

Asked about newspaper sources for the history, Mr. Waller said that there were only a few original issues of newspapers in the collection and the newspaper clippings on file at the library consisted of only scattered items, practically all of them laudatory. There were two volumes of selected clippings, which obviously were inadequate. Most of them bore no notations as to the names of the papers or the date of issue. It was necessary to locate files of the local newspapers (if possible an unfriendly as well as a friendly newspaper) and mine them for information about the company — its policies, its labor relations, its profits, and its community contributions. The editor of one of the papers under consideration appeared to be personally hostile to Mr. Nye. He sided with labor in strikes and other controversies with the company. This constituted a good though obviously biased source, and the experienced researcher could easily strike a balance between what actually happened and what was clearly slanted newspaper reporting or editorial comment.

¹ The following paragraph, covering the content of the obituary notice and the extract from the county history, is inserted here because lack of space prevents printing the items in full. The extract from the diary appears at the end of this article.

Miss Smith commented on the necessity for consulting newspapers outside the La Crosse area for a better picture of the company, its influence, and its policies. Comments from outside were likely to be less partisan and give a better picture of what actually happened.

On question, Mrs. Kellar reported that the Nye collection in the La Crosse Public Library contained a number of books and other printed items. First of these were publications containing biographical information on members of the family. There were also a large number of pamphlets, circulars, and advertising brochures, together with dissertations on tariffs, and clippings on events within the country affecting the company. These materials indicated that Nye was a man of wide interests. There were other printed items in favor of a high tariff, on patents, and on the litigation which resulted from Nye's business activities; books on advertising; a good set of agricultural periodicals containing advertisements, articles, and notes about the XYZ Plow Company, as well as rival companies; and catalogs issued by rival plow companies.

Miss Smith reported that the Nye papers comprised a good personal manuscript collection, including a considerable amount of correspondence. A two-volume diary, 1865 to early 1910, proved that Nye was obviously a war veteran. The entries were very revealing, covering the beginnings of the plow company and containing unique material on its early days, which could be recaptured from no other source since the writer was dead. Mr. Lichter questioned the authenticity of the diary, since it claimed that the writer had journeyed by boat from Savannah to La Crosse in January. Mr. Kellar thought this proved that the diary, like all diaries, must be used with caution. Miss Smith said that the collection also contained a personal letter-press copy book. Some of the copies were legible, some were not. Mr. Kellar demonstrated how illegible entries could often be made readable by inserting a sheet of heavy white paper under the copy sheet, and pulling the copy sheet taut. Use of a magnifying glass would still be necessary in other instances.

Mr. Kellar referred to the voluminous business correspondence of the plow company, both letters received and sent, which contained information on every phase of the company's activities.

Mr. Lichter spoke of the models in the collection. These consisted of both patent models, including undeveloped and nonworkable improvements, and cast-iron models for the use of the company's salesmen and for fairs and expositions. There were also medals, awards, and prizes, both domestic and foreign. Mr. Kellar asked if Mr. Lichter thought the collection contained any forgeries in this field. Mr. Lichter thought not. Medals are forged only when they have real collector's value. He could not imagine the company forging any awards it did not actually win. Mr. Kellar knew of one or two such forgeries by rivals of the McCormick Reaper Company. He stressed the importance of checking the authenticity of accounts of the various expositions indicating that certain prizes had supposedly been won, to be sure of accuracy of statement. Mr. Lichter thought such forgeries were usually confined to the newspaper publicity on such awards, which could be and had been faked both in the text and the accompanying photographs. The latter were particularly

subject to forgery and faking. The collection contained a large number of illustrations and calendars.

Among the other museum items, Mr. Lichter mentioned the "Castle," the residence of Mr. Nye. This was an elaborate mansion of Renaissance-revival style, in good condition. It contained much furniture, china, pottery, clothes, and accessories. The carriage house, also standing, had in it cutters, coaches, and wagons.

Mr. Waller thought the Castle and its contents interesting to look at, but raised the question of their value for an analytical history of the county. Mr. Lichter thought that it showed how the wealthy lived in that part of the country at that particular time. He agreed that this part of the collection was of little use for the history of the county. Mr. Kellar, on the contrary, thought it was of great use. It proved the Horatio Alger possibilities for a man who had risen from nothing to great wealth and to a position from which he dominated La Crosse for 50 years. What Mr. Nye had acquired would tell a lot about the man, his interests, and so forth. Mr. Lichter agreed, but wondered if most of the good things had not been sold off or otherwise disposed of. That being true, Mr. Waller asked why not tear the whole thing down? Mr. Lichter thought it a specimen of a type which should be left standing as a monument to an era. The carriage house could be converted to a county historical museum, provided the money was forthcoming. This would be worth while, but the job must be well done or not done at all. The country already had too many shabby old houses preserved.

Mrs. Kellar asked if the remaining furnishings and bric-a-brac showed what kind of people the Nyes were? Was the house filled with items showing a French, German, or Italian influence? Mr. Lichter questioned whether the furnishings indicated much. He thought that most tourists of that period brought back the same things. It was popular to collect pseudo-Italian masters, majolica, and items of like nature; and the Nyes had collected the same things abroad that all other Americans did. All the collection showed was that the Nyes lacked an informed knowledge and taste in arts and decoration and had followed contemporary trends of collection in what they had brought back from their tours. Mr. Lichter commented that the women of families usually dominated in furnishing the house. Only Nye's den would give any useful indication of his interests, and it had been cleaned out.

Mr. Gara thought that Mr. Lichter's tendency to assign people to types was the negation of the basic philosophy of local history. People are individuals and just cannot be typed. Mr. Lichter replied that he was typing only the house, not the man. Miss Smith commented that in looking at such houses you looked not for the typical so much as the unusual.

Mr. Duckett reported that the collections contained a large number of photographs, lithographs, circulars, and broadsides. The series of photographs on the company, factory, personnel, and products was very valuable. Pictures proverbially were worth a thousand words, and this was an excellent collection. He pointed out the danger of distortion in lithographs and broadsides, where the artist's viewpoint and perspective could alter the whole effect, deliberately

or otherwise. Mr. Lichter pointed out that even the camera lied at times by forcing perspective (as in many current real estate ads) or by retouching or use of the modern airbrush. Mr. Kellar used this illustration to caution the institute to approach research with a wary eye. You had to watch your step, exercise constant vigilance and a healthy skepticism. He then showed some samples of advertising literature, posters, and catalogs.

Mr. Waller questioned the value of advertisements as a source of history. Since they were designed to sell the product, he thought their value to the serious historian was limited to giving a certain feel for the company's activities. Mr. Kellar thought them useful as illustrations of technological advances. Mr. Gara thought them very significant as commentaries on how the company advertised, useful too for a history of advertising.

Mr. Kellar called attention to the fact that Nye's invention of the riding plow had come 10 years before public acceptance. This was typical of the experience of many inventors. They had the right ideas, but the public was not ready for them. The riding plow had to await the evolution of the independent steam-traction engine, such as the 1869 Case. These steam engines in time, in order to develop more horsepower, became perfectly huge; and they had reached the limit of their effective development when the smaller internal combustion engines, with more condensed power, came along to supplant them. This was early in the twentieth century. Perfection of the Fordson tractor of 1914 marked a revolution in farm power. The tractor, at first regarded dubiously on the farm, was popularized by Army use during World War I. From it developed the remarkable all-purpose tractor of the 1930's. The effect of these dramatic changes is shown in the Nye company records, which indicate that the plow company went bankrupt largely because it did not keep up with technological advances.

Mrs. Stifler, currently engaged in writing a history of a Massachusetts business, commented on what the record showed about Nye's experience with the riding plow and the state of the country's economy. Worcester had refused to take on its manufacture because of the post-Civil-War depression, eventually marked by the crash of 1873. It was not until the country recovered that the riding plow was successfully manufactured.

Mr. Gara reported that in the way of reminiscences, the collection contained only two tape recordings. These were by old family servants. Although the tapes contained some unique personal-interest stories, they had to be used with care. There was also the record of the testimony of the manager of the firm at the time of its bankruptcy, and the testimony of Nye's partner. The latter was useless, as it had been carefully culled by the company lawyer. In commenting on investigations as distinct from testimony, Mr. Gara cautioned against the various biases and political motivations that might twist the nature of the investigation.

Mr. Kellar closed the morning panel discussion with a brief summary of the types of records found in the collection and announced that the afternoon session would be devoted to how to use the information obtained from these materials.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION, 1:30 P.M.

In the afternoon the panel began with a discussion of the possible uses of the information assembled about the imaginary XYZ Plow Company. Mrs. Kellar spoke of the voluminous records available for books — both a history of the company and a biography of the founder. She suggested the use of the museum objects, such as clothes and accessories, in a pageant on the history of the company. Mrs. Kellar said that it was necessary that such pageants step lively; often their pace was much too slow. As to scope, the pageant should be tied to the larger events and area but should be local in immediate focus. It should work toward a climax, begin and end with a dramatic incident. Anything which could be depicted, worn, carried, or propelled was useful for a pageant. Mr. Gara commented that his old high school had produced an annual pageant, with a different theme each year. He thought that the La Crosse people should put on an annual pageant of the kind Mrs. Kellar was proposing. Such events always aroused considerable public interest in local history.

Miss Appel believed that almost everything in the collection was grist for the short story and/or novel writer. She commented briefly on the difficulties inherent in both forms of literary expression and wondered if either could be written in a strictly historical form, eschewing the introduction of anything imaginative. The implication was that she did not believe this could be done. Mr. Kellar commented that the records were full of dramatic episodes, which could be used in either vehicle for dramatic effect. Miss Smith wondered how the novelist would fill the gaps in the historical data in rounding out his work. Mr. Kellar suggested the use of parallel sources, citing his own acquisition of the records of some neighboring iron works to fill the gap caused by the loss of the records of Cyrus McCormick's early iron-furnace venture. Miss Appel said that that was just what she meant: you could not fully document a good novel; a novel is an art form, subject to its own tenets of construction. Mr. Duckett pointed out that after using all the voluminous Nye records, a tremendous amount of supplementary research would have to be done on customs, the language as it was spoken then and there (if dialog were to be introduced into the novel), life of the times, dress, and so forth. Miss Smith wondered what the result would be; history or fiction — an old, old question.

Mrs. Kellar spoke of the wealth of opportunities to utilize the Nye collections in illustrated lectures. She cited the pictures of machines, the factory, and the personnel; advertising posters; and key manuscripts, all of which lent themselves to use as slide lecture material. She also commented on the wealth of material for movies on Nye, the company, contemporary La Crosse, and other topics.

Mr. Duckett thought that many materials could be used for radio programs. He suggested the use of one of the dramatic incidents to which Mr. Kellar had referred, to introduce each program, followed by a history of the company and/or the personalities involved. Perhaps a program or two of this type could be used as a segment of a series on Wisconsin industry or the history of La Crosse.

Mr. Gara thought there were possibilities for good TV shows; the pageant he had spoken of earlier could be filmed or perhaps broadcast live; abbreviated plays based on the collections could also be broadcast. Mrs. Kellar spoke of the models as suitable materials for "master-teacher" TV shows. Mr. Kellar noted that the use of TV as a vehicle for stirring interest in history is in its infancy. The panel was necessarily inexperienced in this field, but it had ideas. Mr. Gara thought that any TV presentation must necessarily be superficial. It might interest people in getting deeper into history on their own or in a group activity, but it was no end in itself. Mr. Lichter thought that all such audiovisual programs of this type were necessarily one-shot affairs, because of the limited local nature of the material. His hope would be that the TV programs would attract people to explore the collections as a whole.

Mr. Duckett thought that there was much material here for feature stories for the newspapers of the area, stories which might be rewritten by the professional rewrite man for use in national magazines. Such stories should be dramatic and full of punch and appeal to the emotions, as well, of course, as being historically sound. Mr. Kellar feared that unhappily the rewrite man might not have too much respect for historical accuracy. Miss Appel commented that all feature stories of this type are also art forms and that the combination of historical accuracy with the necessities of a good story presents a very difficult problem.

Mr. Kellar inquired how a historical museum would make use of the materials of the collection. Mr. Lichter suggested first of all a series of dioramas that would pack much information and great public appeal into a very small area. He could see dioramas on the growth of the physical plant of the company, the early shops and fabricating techniques, the manufacture of parts, and field trials of the equipment. He also thought a series of paintings covering similar subjects was a useful alternative. Exhibits of photographs illustrating the development of the factory, its techniques, its products, and its staff would be interesting. If the photographs were mounted in albums they should be on separate pages so that they could be combined in different order in different exhibits. He preferred to remove them and file them in a file case for maximum flexibility in their use. The models and other scale models of improvements would be significant and interesting to the public, too. Mr. Kellar commented that dioramas required a great wealth of background knowledge on the part of the maker. Mrs. Kellar thought a diorama project would furnish an excellent tie with the schools. The children could make the dioramas in history and art classes, and the dioramas would thus form a nucleus for interesting the children in history.

The panel then turned to uses of the collections appealing to the more serious-minded. Miss Krueger spoke of the possibilities of articles for historical periodicals. She saw material here for a general biographical sketch of Peter Nye, utilizing the diary, letters, and reminiscences. The diary itself could be published in whole or in part after proper editing. For the technical journals, there were possibilities in the history of the development of the product and the means of producing it. Mr. Gara saw significant materials for studies in

profits, risk capital, labor relations, and the growth of capital; for studies on the impact of the American export of machinery on foreign countries; for articles on the social and economic history of fairs, where many customers had first become acquainted with the products of the XYZ Plow Company; for studies of the impact of war on the local industry and the local economy and society; and for studies on the transformation of individuals in new environments, as Nye the Easterner had become Nye the Midwesterner. He saw so much material here that without planning and great selectivity the potential author could find himself swamped with too much material on too many topics. Mr. Duckett commented that the collections were probably better adapted to the scholarly historical article than to any other form so far discussed.

Mr. Gara spoke of the utility of the collections in college-level history teaching. Such a collection, by its local presence, would be useful in motivating students toward research and toward learning research techniques. Many pieces were well adapted to illustrative use in lectures. Then, at the seminar level, here were the raw materials of history; and the seminar could readily learn how to use such materials by actually using the Nye collection. Such use should develop the student's ability to handle records critically, whether he is going into research as a career or not. Mr. Duckett feared that because the materials would be familiar to local students, they might not see them as history. Mr. Kellar thought this a misapprehension of history that we should dispose of; the student who had some familiarity with the subject matter might be expected to be all the more interested and get more out of it. Mr. Gara mentioned that the collections would be useful not only in history courses, but in sociology and literature. To the list Mr. Kellar added law courses, citing particularly the patent litigation in which the company had become involved.

As to historical books, Miss Appel commented that obviously the collections would be the main source for a biography of Nye or a history of the company. In deciding which to do, the author would have to decide whether Nye was broader than the company or vice versa. If the Nye story were the larger in scope and significance, the biography should be undertaken. If the company story were the larger in scope and significance, then the history of the company should be written. It also depended somewhat on the records and on the proclivities of the author whether the person or the institution should be the dominant theme. One might find some serious gaps in the records of the man; or one might have the man, and serious gaps in the records of the company. This would obviously influence the decision on which book to write. Of course in addition to the collections, the author would have to read all around the subject in newspapers, technical journals, and other related materials. Above all the author should have and should cultivate technical skill in writing.

Mr. Gara saw a number of theses that could be written from the collections. Here, the only new element is the instructor, with the duty of guiding the master's candidates through the mass of material. Any of the articles he had earlier suggested could be seminar papers or perhaps even masters' theses. He would add another topic: the motives behind nineteenth century charity as exemplified by Nye. Mr. Kellar asked if Nye would be an acceptable candidate

for inclusion in the *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*. Miss Smith replied that he was a typical Wisconsin industrialist of considerable prominence in his generation, and that he no doubt would be accepted by the board of editors.

At the close of the afternoon session the meeting was opened to general discussion and spirited comment ensued, which lasted three quarters of an hour and indicated that the audience had received much of value from the presentation. Several of those present commented on the fact that the members of the panel were so thoroughly versed in the history of the XYZ Plow Company that they made it seem very real, almost as if it had actually existed.

PETER EDWARD NYE DIARY, 1845-1910

Extract for the period 1865-1866

[This gives Nye's own story of why he went to La Crosse and established the XYZ Plow Company.]

Appomattox
Court House,
Virginia,
April 30, 1865

Today I was discharged from the Army of the United States. Record has been honorable, although not distinguished. Wounded once, captured and escaped. Citation at Chancellorsville. Entered as a private, leaving as a Captain. Received three months back pay. Considered indulging in spirits but decided against it. Start return to Worcester tomorrow.

Worcester,
Massachusetts,
May 5, 1865

Arrived here today. Saw Mr. Moore and can go back to work as manager of the factory of Barney and Moore. Moore is dissatisfied with Smith, the man who took my place when I went into the Army. Told Mr. Moore I needed a rest for a few months. Agreed to report to factory in January 1866. I could have returned to work tomorrow, but did not tell that to Mr. Moore. Have two things I wish to do and need time for both of them. *One* is to complete my invention of the Sulky or Riding Plow and obtain a Patent for it, so that my rights will be protected. *Two*, is to marry Elsie Callahan Moore, Mr. Moore's daughter. No one knows about either of these things — except perhaps Elsie, who is aware of my regard for her. I have told no one about my plow. Saw Elsie tonight at the Church Social. I think she was glad to see me although she was shy.

Worcester,
May 10, 1865

Elsie asks what I do all day. Told her I was still resting. She seemed skeptical. This business of giving an equal amount of time to the invention and to Elsie, which I thought would be easy, is growing

more difficult. May have to stop seeing Elsie until I complete the plow. No, I can't do that!! Must find some other way to solve the problem.

Worcester,
May 16, 1865

Have told Elsie about the Plow. She seemed pleased and will tell no one about it, particularly her father. Want to have complete freedom about the Plow when I talk with Moore later about having Barneby and Moore manufacture and sell it. Elsie confessed she had been suspicious of my "long rest." We have agreed that I am to see her only two days a week and work on my invention the rest of the time so as to complete it in the near future. Feel much better about things in general.

Worcester,
May 24, 1865

Spent three days this week courting Elsie! I believe she cares for me.

Worcester,
Week of June 1, 1865

Am making a *model* of the Riding Plow. Had to change mechanism to incline mould boards and points into ground, when two plows start to make furrows; also to better control raising of plows out of ground while turning sulky at end of furrows and before starting new furrows. Courting Elsie.

Worcester,
Week of June 8, 1865

Elsie has promised to be my wife. I am a happy and fortunate man. Told Mr. Moore about Elsie and he was non-committal, but I do not think he will oppose our marriage. He probably believes I should have first obtained his permission to pay my respects to Elsie. *I do not believe* in this custom.

Worcester,
Week of June 15, 1865

Model completed and works well. Have retained Attorney Sam Adams to work out Patent Specifications and Claims. This is costly but necessary. The Courts are filled with cases of patent infringement because the inventor did not properly protect his rights. Sam is excited about the possibilities of the use of my riding plow.

Worcester,
Week of June 22, 1865

Our Wedding Day is set for July 10th.

Worcester,
Week of July 6, 1865

Busy with preparations for Wedding. See Elsie very little. She is engaged all the time with dress-makers. Have bought a new suit.

Worcester,
August 2, 1865

Elsie and I were married on July 10, 1865, at the First Presbyterian Church at 7 p.m. by the Reverend

Rufus Johnson, and went to Niagara Falls for a honeymoon. We had a wonderful three weeks and I am very happy. Think Elsie is too.

Returned to Worcester yesterday. We are living in a small house on Mills Street, which I have rented. Went over my bank account this morning. Of the \$5,000 which I saved before the War, and the \$300 brought back from Appomattox, only \$2,000 remains. Must make my plow pay and soon. Elsie is a good cook. She has a pleasant disposition, generally speaking, but I find she also has a temper! Oh well, so have I! We will get along all right.

Worcester,
Week of August 3, 1865 Have several ideas for adding improvements to my Riding Plow. Could adapt frame work so as to haul several corn planters or grain drills. Might take out further patents later. Nothing from Adams about Patent Application.

Worcester,
Week of August 10, 1865 Mr. Moore wants me to come back to work. Can't talk to him until I know about patent. Working on the improvements.

Worcester,
Week of August 24, 1865 Continued to work on improvements for riding plow.

Worcester,
September 1, 1865 Patent Application has been accepted. Sam Adams says the Patent will be forwarded shortly.

Worcester,
September 6, 1865 Patent for Riding Plow to Peter Edward Nye, dated September 2, 1865 has been received. Now I will talk with Mr. Moore. If they manufacture my plow it may mean a junior partnership in Barneby and Moore.

Worcester,
September 7, 1865 Saw Mr. Moore today and told him about Riding Plow and Patent for it. Suggested that the Company manufacture the plow and pay me a royalty. \$10 a plow. We talked at length. Mr. Moore non-committal but agreed to have the Company build a full sized machine and try it out. He will also consult his partners about future manufacture if the machine operates successfully.

Worcester, Week of
September 14, 1865 Supervised the making of the Riding Plow. Many details.

Worcester, Week of
September 21, 1865 Still working on Plow. Castings completed. Nothing more from Mr. Moore.

Worcester,
Week of Sept. 28, 1865

Framework ready.

Worcester,
Week of Oct. 6, 1865

Parts finished and Plow assembled. Will have trial tomorrow. Elsie much excited and I am as well.

Worcester,
Week of Oct. 13, 1865

Trials held all week. Certain small defects developed which I have remedied. On the whole the Riding Plow works very well and Elsie and I are delighted with it. Mr. Moore has said nothing.

Worcester,
Week of Oct. 22, 1865

Have talked with Mr. Moore every day. Admits the Riding Plow operates all right, but thinks the farmers are too conservative and will not buy it until after a long educational campaign. Reluctant to pay for this and says manufacture at this time is a costly gamble. I am discouraged but still believe in this invention. Elsie is standing by me and is a great help.

Worcester,
December 1, 1865

Conferences continued all through November. Got nowhere with Mr. Moore. After a talk with Elsie told him I would not go back to the Company in January 1866. Instead I will take my Riding Plow to the Mississippi Valley and set up a Plow Company to manufacture it for that vast region. Mr. Moore is cold and hostile to these plans but Elsie supports my stand staunchly. I must find capital.

La Crosse,
Wisconsin,
January 16, 1866

Unable to find financial support in Worcester for my proposed Plow Company. Elsie and I determined to travel West and try to obtain funds there. Immediately after Christmas, to which Mr. Moore contributed no cheer, Elsie and I took a train to Chicago and then to Savannah, Illinois, where we boarded the Steamboat Lorraine, with St. Paul, Minnesota as our destination. That is where I thought we might settle.

On the Boat we met William Xenophon Brandon, a banker and lumberman from La Crosse. Brandon became interested in my plow and suggested that I select La Crosse rather than St. Paul as the center of my operations. He pointed out the facilities present at La Crosse, and offered to supply necessary capital for a partnership in the Plow Company.

La Crosse,
January 23, 1866

Investigation here has shown that Mr. Brandon is sound financially and well liked personally. I have accepted his offer and the XYZ Plow Company is now formally and legally organized. Our first concern is to build a factory. La Crosse is a thriving young city surrounded by a rich farming community and I think we will do well in this country.

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