ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

RECOLLECTIONS OF REV. O. P. CLINTON.

His arrival at the Rapids—Stops with Harrison Reed—Incidents in connection with holding religious services in the early days—Places where he preached—a trip to Green Bay—John R. Kimberly’s advice to the Brewer—Early day incidents—killing of bear and deer on the Island—Etc., Etc.

To G. A. Cunningham:

Sir:—In reply to your request to furnish a sketch of early day transactions, I submit the following roughly-drawn and brief narrative of my coming to Neenah, and a few incidents of early day doings.

My first visit to the place was in December, 1845, when I was hospitably entertained by Harrison Reed, Esq., and his agreeable lady, at their block house during my short stay. I saw at a glance the importance of the locality, and at once interested myself in directing attention to it both by personal conversation and written reports. Results have proved that I did not overestimate the importance of the point. Among the persons immigrating to the outlet of Winnebago lake, as the result of these personal efforts directly or indirectly, I may mention L. H. and Harvey Jones, and other relatives, James Ladd, J. F. Johnston, H. T. Finch, Deacon Mitchell, L. Wheatley, John Sanborn, Deacon Donaldson, C. Northrup and son, and others.

In the month of March, 1846, I removed my family
from Lake Mills, Jefferson county, to Winnebago Rapids, occupying a block house on the Point above the outlet of the lake, and the following Sabbath held religious services at my house, which was the beginning of religious meetings in Neenah. I then represented the American Home Missionary Society as a missionary for Northern Wisconsin. My preaching places for that season, regular and incidental, were Oshkosh, Rosendale, Springvale, Waukau, Rushford, Strong's Landing, (now Berlin,) Fond du Lac, and Neenah.

To compass my circuit required four weeks, making my regular service at Neenah every fourth Sabbath, the intermediate Sabbaths being occupied with Sabbath Schools and reading meetings. In the early part of the summer of 1841, we renovated an old block house, which we found without floor, door or windows, and appropriated it to church and school purposes. In this house the lamented Deacon Mitchell was married in a public congregation to his estimable wife, Miss Caroline Boynton, a former pupil of mine. Those were days of small things, of sacrifices, privations, and earnest work, and yet days of sobriety, friendship and peace. Our gatherings were seasons of warm, friendly greetings, with the pioneer grip which none but first settlers can appreciate.

My first missionary year in north Wisconsin cost me drives in all of about seven thousand miles, affording me the opportunity of preaching about two hundred sermons. Nearly all the supplies for my family were hauled from Oshkosh in my buggy, on my monthly return trips, over horrible roads, always taking an axe along to chop around the seemingly bottomless mud pits. Little rest and no rust in those pioneer times.
In the summer of 1847 an exchange was arranged between Rev. J. Porter, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Green Bay, and myself. But how to execute the arrangement, with no roads or bridges, was the difficulty. But the pioneer doctrine is "Where there is a will, there is a way." Well, by virtue of having a brother who was a blacksmith, I nailed some shoes to my horse's feet, (it could not be called shoeing,) took Mrs. C. and the little C.'s into the buggy, forded both rivers at the outlet, followed the beach of the lake to Clifton, often in rounding trees and logs, plunging the horse into water nearly to his girth. At that time there were no settlers at Clifton. Having despatched our lunch upon the native grass, with axe in hand I lead the way, following an overgrown road of Black Hawk antiquity, and cut our way through two miles to the military road, and then the way was clear to Green Bay. Several times I drove from Neenah to Jefferson county to meetings of councils, conventions, and once from Fort Atkinson to Palymsyra and preached the ordination sermon of Rev. C. Camp, now of Waukesha.

In an early day, one Jones, of Welsh extraction, or some other honorable nationality, dropped in to our settlement and proposed to start a respectable brewery. Some questions arose between the proprietors of the soil and the would-be brewer, as to the site of such an institution. John Kimberly, Esq., had chosen Neenah as his home and he was thought to be a competent adviser in this grave matter. The question was therefore proposed in a business like manner: "Mr. Kimberly, where do you think would be the best site for a brewery?" The characteristic reply was, "In h—l, sir!" But this opinion of Mr. Kimberly's was overruled by
other counsel, who thought the machine could be run more successfully in Neenah. And so it was erected upon the beautiful banks of the Fox river, in full view of Mr. Kimberly’s residence, a practical proof of the successful rivalry of Neenah.

In the autumn of 1847 I moved into Gov. Doty’s house, on Doty Island. The following summer a bear put in an appearance on the opposite Point. Taking a gun, I paddled my dug out across below, and cut off his retreat. Discovering his danger, he artfully crept from my sight, took to the water and struck for the Island. Mrs. Clinton, seeing Bruin’s prospects of escape, with stones and clubs, and terrific shouting, kept him at bay until an Indian reached the scene of excitement and dispatched his bearship. The Indian complimented Mrs. C. as best he could, calling her “brave squaw,” etc. One evening a huge panther came prowling around our premises, uttering the most terrific screeches. Several shots were fired at him in the twilight, some of which evidently took effect, as a young panther, a short time after came out, moaning, in a starving condition, and was shot and killed by one Thomas McGahan, then in my employ. Deer were quite plenty, and the Island was a favorite resort for them. I killed one near the present site of the Northwestern depot. We occasionally had a bear hunt on a small scale. On one occasion I had a fine sight of one and my gun missed fire, but he was soon halted by Lum Hart’s sure fire. Judge Wheeler killed one with a shot gun. So you see our fresh meat markets were flush, if somewhat scattered, consisting not only of deer and bears, but coons, squirrels, rabbits, pigeons, pheasants, etc., to say nothing of fish and water flowls, which were abundant.
But I am taxing your patience. I could tell you of our early navigation; of the little steamer Manchester, which could run to Oshkosh almost as soon as a boy could walk it. Also how we landed women and children from the sail boats in a brisk wind and storm, some on horse-back and some on human back. Ask Mrs. Enos how she was taken from a boat in front of my house, when she was a young lady. I could also tell you of missionary tours to Oshkosh and Stockbridge in a dug-out. But I hear you say enough such, and I am of the same opinion. Yours in remembrance of old times.

O. P. CLINTON.