II HOME TOWN....

In June, 1854, two ox-teams wound their way through the hills of what is now Fillmore county, in southeastern Minnesota, seeking a spot where their drivers might establish a home. At the bottom of the valley they found what they were looking for and so came the first settlement on the present site of Rushford.

In the wagons were the families of Duncan Cameron and Roderick McLeod, and they built cabins and settled down to live in the wilderness. The nearest neighbors were many miles away and Indians still roamed the country. The McLeods had several children, among them a son, John, and after three quarters of a century John helped celebrate Rushford's Diamond Jubilee in 1929.

I recall John McLeod as Master of the local Masonic Lodge when I became a member. He was a tall, powerfully built man whose stentorian voice carried authority in everything connected with the settlement's growth and progress. He became, later, a leader in the city of Rushford.

After the Camerons and McLeods it was not long before other families arrived. Soon there was a goodly number of people there, including Rev. W. W. Snell and Solomon and George West from Massachusetts. They built homes and Rev. Snell, whom I remember well, conducted the first religious service at the Cameron home.

Otis Bathrick arrived in 1856 and T. J. Fladeland and George G. Stevens the following year. Drs. H. H. Everts and H. C. Grover, Rushford's first physicians, arrived a little later. Dr. Grover was our family physician. He attended our family when nearly all my brothers and sisters were down with scarlet fever. Our living room resembled a hospital ward. I had had my siege and was washing dishes when Dr. Grover suddenly appeared at the kitchen door. The front door opened directly into the "hospital ward".

I did not like being caught washing dishes and was somewhat abashed. He noted my embarrassment and said: "That's right, my boy, always help your mother. I often washed the dishes in my early days." I felt relieved. Years later when he gave me a physical examination preparatory to my trip to the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, he recalled this incident.

Other families, including Valentine, Pease, Endicott and Iverson soon arrived. Mail in 1856 was brought by wagon from La Crosse, Wisconsin, 35 miles distant. C. J. Hulbert became Rushford's first postmaster in 1857. The winter of 1856 had been unusually severe and for the greater part of that season the settlers subsisted on johnny cake alone.

Nine pupils attended the school opened in 1857 with Miss Martha Emery, the first teacher. The next year twenty-four pupils attended school with Miss Jane Walker as teacher. She was paid $15.00 a month. One of her pupils was John McLeod. The name Walker, is familiar. Father bought his home site in Walker's Addition.
Rushford men responded patriotically to Lincoln’s call for volunteers during the Civil War. Thirty-one were mustered in from Rushford community. The railroad reached the village in 1867. The Congregational Church was the first church in the village. William Cullen Bryant contributed towards the building fund and the church bell which was used for the first time, Christmas Eve, 1860. The Methodist Church was organized in 1860.

3.

Eighty persons attended the first Fourth of July celebration in 1856. In 1857 the Rushford Gazette made its initial bow. Rushford had received its name at a Christmas party in 1854 when Mrs. C. Walker had suggested it. The name came to mind, she said, from the abundance of rushes growing along Rush Creek and from the fords of the creek and Root River nearby. Other names were proposed but Rushford it was.

During later years swarms of settlers came to occupy the fertile valleys and prairies surrounding Rushford. The area to the east became known as Irish Ridge. To the north Germans came in large groups, with Bohemians nearby. Norwegians homesteaded along Root River to the east and west and settled the prairies to the west and south. The settlements rapidly expanded Rushford’s trading area, population and wealth. A new city had been built.

4.

A huge “bluff” dominated the site. “Bluff” simply meant the valley’s wall. At its top was the edge of the prairie 500 feet above the level of the valley. The valleys of Root River and Rush Creek converged at Rushford which caused the huge bluff, named Magellsen’s Bluff which separated the valleys, to be seen first by anyone approaching the city.
Stevens Avenue curved around the base of the bluff. It was lined with substantial and in some instances quite impressive homes of the well-to-do. It was a broad avenue forming almost a semi-circle, extending nearly to Pheiffer's Brewery and Tew's Mill, located near Rush Creek. It was lined with beautiful elm trees that were already almost full-grown when I first saw them. This avenue was laid out in the grand manner.

Near its central point, Rushford Avenue began, forming a right angle with Stevens Avenue and extended almost a mile eastwardly across Rush Creek through Brooklyn (the name afterwards given to East Rushford) to the bluff on the eastern border of the city. These two avenues dominated the city. There were two roadways on Rushford Avenue. The first dual highway of my recollection. Between them were parks which extended from bluff to bluff with a single roadway at the Rush Creek bridge. Elms placed in four straight rows lined the parks. Here was a well-planned park system bearing testimony to the foresight and vision of the city's founders.

5.

Here was space for playgrounds laid out long before play facilities were even mentioned in many places. They were for both young and old. Croquet was a favorite game with the elders. Each afternoon or early evening found its devotees playing that fascinating game, judging angles in approaching the arches, musing often and long on the strategic blocking of the opposition and deeply weighing the exact amount of strength to use on the mallet in propelling the ball just the right distance.

By some quirk, or something, the city's main school building was located far from the city's center. I might say the farthest possible distance from it. What ideas or manipulations caused this to be done rest unwritten, undisclosed in the history of the city. It meant a two mile walk from North Rushford and more than a mile from the center of the city. Good exercise in walking, of course. On rainy days and during the winter months there was discomfort. No school busses those days. A year or two after the city celebrated its Diamond Jubilee a new building centrally located was built.

6.

The Root River valley in southeastern Minnesota has won acclaim for its charm and beauty. It was almost impossible during early days to follow the river as due to frequent floods, roads were built mainly along the base of the bluffs. When improved highways were built this valley came into its own. Trees cover the bluff sides which are broken, in turn, by gorges and valleys. There is infinite variety of scenes which change every second as the car advances. Southeastern Minnesota escaped the last glacial thrust from the north. Its valleys, hills, bluffs and prairies are in the state's oldest geologic area. In fall the view presents a breathtaking panorama of form and color. The early settlers had made a wise choice.
There were four of us.

"It was not all work and no play—my sister caught the biggest fish."