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## “To do for my self”: Footloose on the Old Northwest Frontier

*Edited by William C. Wilkinson\**

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The account that follows is the story of life in the Old Northwest Territory during the frontier period as recollected by the narrator, John Wilkinson. It is not a tale of heroics, but rather the story of a man facing life's requirements and carrying them out in an honest and honorable manner. That it took place at a time and in a land that was evolving from a wilderness into a settled agricultural expanse makes it pertinent to the history of the Northwest Territory and the resulting states.

Joseph Wilkinson and Ruth Ratcliff, the parents of John, had arrived with their families in southeastern Ohio in the fall of 1804, the year following Ohio's admission to statehood.<sup>1</sup> They were both in their early teens as the wagon trains slowly moved from the Piedmont area of North Carolina through the Appalachian Mountain passes, along and on the Kanawha River of what is now West Virginia to the Ohio River. Here they floated their wagons and other possessions over into the newly formed first state of the Northwest Territory. Both children lost their mothers soon afterward, perhaps due to the rigors of the journey. On the frontier, where neighbors were rare, proximity and similar backgrounds brought about their marriage, August 30, 1810, in the area then controlled by Ross County. John was the second in their family of eight children that grew to adulthood: Hiram, John, Seth, Amy, Harriet, Maria, William, and Margaret.<sup>2</sup>

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\* William C. Wilkinson, a 1941 engineering graduate of Purdue University, is now retired. He has pursued historical research as an avocation throughout his lifetime. William Wilkinson, youngest brother of John, is his great-grandfather. The document was handed down from John Wilkinson through a son and a granddaughter to a great-grandson, where it was donated to the Moulton Historical Society, Moulton, Iowa, near John's final home. William C. Wilkinson wishes to thank the numerous individuals, libraries, and societies that have aided in editing the manuscript. His particular thanks go to Hayward Goff, Jr., who first brought the document to his attention, to the late Lois Corder, who provided a copy for his use, and to Christine Anderson, who obtained permission to publish.

<sup>1</sup> Williams Bros., pub., *History of Ross and Highland Counties, Ohio* (Cleveland, 1880), 272.

<sup>2</sup> Information obtained from the John Wilkinson family Bible.

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During John Wilkinson's lifetime the axe was replacing the rifle and would be replaced by the plow. In this half century peoples spread like a tide from the Appalachian Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The Wilkinson family was one of the numerous upland southern groups that helped people the Midwest after the Revolutionary War—the pioneering type that moved onward at each generation, leapfrogging settled areas for the newly opened public lands toward the west. Every twenty years or so, all or a portion of the family loaded the wagons and set out.

The Wilkinson family was like many others on the frontier. Indeed, its travels and John's particular activities had a certain parallel to Abraham Lincoln's family and his early years. Both families moved by generation from the southern highlands to Indiana, then to Illinois, driving oxen teams and building log cabins as the need arose. John's sortie into northern Illinois and his flatboat trip down to New Orleans followed by a year or two Lincoln's similar travels. Both were axmen and used this frontier tool for shelter and income, splitting out rails and cordwood.

John Wilkinson's travels and adventures as a youth and young man are those that many boys today dream about and yearn for but never experience other than through reading. One can sense a feeling of satisfaction and pride in the recount, even after a lapse of fifty years spent at farming, carpentering, and rearing a large family. John was not a hero type, except possibly to his younger brothers. He was a doer, however, and rode with opportunity whenever it came passing by, as evidenced by his words, "having but little opertunity of going to schoole tho I could wread and write so as to be wread." And so he could. His reminiscence not only makes interesting reading, but also offers insight into life on the Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa frontiers during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The original of this little history was written when John was not yet seventy years of age, seventeen years before his death. The story ends the year his wife Mary Jane died, in 1875. After four years of widowhood John married Anthrite Derrickson on August 13, 1879. He lived another twenty years with his second wife and died April 1, 1899, at the age of eighty-seven, outliving all of his brothers and sisters. He is buried in the Perjue or Riggs Cemetery a few miles from his Iowa home.

January the 16th, 1882—<sup>1</sup>

A history or sketch of the life of John Wilkinson as given by himself the pearson of this sketch and the second son of Joseph and Ruth Wilkinson I was borne in Ross co ohio—in the year 18.12 Sept the 23 then when I was about 6—years of age father moved with his famley from Ross co to hocking co. whear he had bought asmall track of wilde barren land<sup>2</sup> country then was new and wilde gaime plentiful at that time had never beene to schoole a day in life I lived with father and worked on the farme at ome[home?] as boys could do going to schoole<sup>3</sup> in the winter for three months in aloge schoole house with greesed paper put over the window to give lite while remaining in hocking co—fathers famley increaced to 8—children 4—boys and 4—girles then in the fall of 18.24<sup>4</sup> father with his family left ohio for the staite of Indiana with one teeme and the teeme consisted of one yoak of oxon and 2—horses and the boys drove 6—head of milk cows after the wagon which father drove himself and after travling about one month<sup>5</sup> we stoped in fountain<sup>6</sup> co Indiana on anice perarie known as Shonee perarie the country

<sup>1</sup> In order to provide the most authentic reproduction possible, John Wilkinson's document has been minimally edited. Spelling, grammar, and syntax have been transcribed exactly as written. Although an attempt was made to determine the punctuation intended by the writer, occasionally it was impossible to distinguish among commas, periods, dashes, pen rests, and blots. Generally John Wilkinson used no punctuation at all, although dashes were sometimes substituted for periods. In order to facilitate reading and avoid confusion, double spaces have been inserted between what appears to be a logical sentence break, and seemingly indiscriminate underlining and dashes at ends of lines were omitted—as were obviously unintentional repetitions. Underlining of numbers and letters within a line of text, however, has been included. Illegible words or phrases are indicated in brackets. John Wilkinson often attached the article "a" to the following word, as in "asmall" and "anice." He also placed his decimal point two spaces to the left in figures; thus, 5.00 denotes 500.

<sup>2</sup> These forty acres were located in hilly wooded land that has been described as "poor farming" land. "Anyone who has traveled over Vinton County [Ohio] does not need to be told that it is not to be recommended as a farming country." Lew Ogan, *History of Vinton County, Ohio* (McArthur, Ohio, 1954), 53.

<sup>3</sup> In 1820 a school was opened in adjacent Elk Township, and the walk to this school would have been about three miles for John, then eight years of age.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that John has erred on this date. Hocking County, Ohio, records note that Joseph turned in a stray horse March 24, 1826. Other records also tend to show that the move was made in the fall of 1826. This is more in consonance with the time line for the stay in Fountain County, Indiana. U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedules for Benton County, Indiana, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> The distance from their residence in Hocking County, Ohio, to Fountain County, Indiana, is about 320 miles. According to one source, a normal rate of travel of a wagon pulled by oxen and accompanied by milk cattle was about twelve miles per day. Thus, the one-month transit time is about what one would expect. See Sanford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* (Lafayette, Ind., 1860), 11-15.

<sup>6</sup> Fountain County was not organized until December 30, 1825, and land sales had begun only a year earlier, December 24, 1824. See Thomas A. Clifton, ed., *Past and Present of Fountain and Warren Counties, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1913), 57-69.

then was new and rather inclinde to be aguary<sup>7</sup> we thare got a lease on the perarie on land known as schoole land<sup>8</sup> or the 16 section and went to work improving and rasing corne which grew and yeald then from 60 to 100—bushels per achor and while living thare we raised and hauld hundreds of bushels of corne to what is known the town of atick<sup>9</sup>—and throw it in to what was colde aflat botomd or—ore orlean boat for the some of \$6.00 per hundred bushel the onley market then that was for corne we compleated our lease that was for 9—years in 4 years and solde the balance of the time on it for 400—dollars and daded 100—achors of unimproved land on Shawney creeke and moved on to it not fare from alittle town known by the naime of Robroy<sup>10</sup> thare we remaind onley a bout one year till father solde out againe to move to the staite of Illinois with his famley still all a living we crossed the wabash river<sup>11</sup> the moning of may the first 18.31 whear the town of Wmsport now stands the county seat of warren co, Indiana and took the road or rather no road across the country towards Chicago<sup>12</sup> our outfit

<sup>7</sup> Ague, a form of malaria, was prevalent in newly settled lands because heavy growth fostered both dampness and mosquitoes.

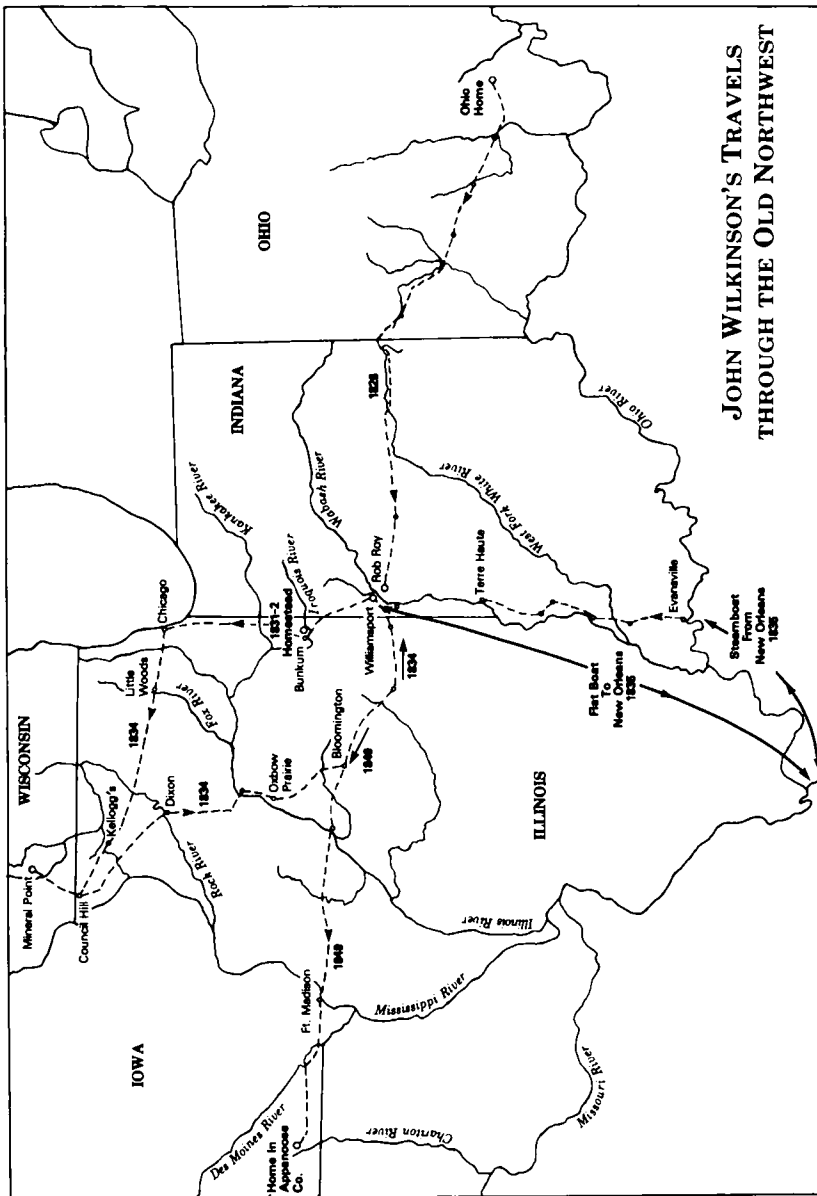
<sup>8</sup> The United States Land Ordinance of 1785, covering disposition of public lands, set aside the sixteenth section in each congressional township "for maintenance of public schools." In Indiana these sections were not authorized to be sold until 1828 and were generally leased for varying periods of years. Although there was some ambiguity in the statutes, the lease limit was seven years and the limit to each leasee was 160 acres. See Richard G. Boone, *A History of Education in Indiana* (New York, 1892), 4, 21, 171. Although Shawnee Prairie is cornered by four such sections it is likely that the Wilkinsons worked the one now contained in Logan Township, about two miles northwest of Rob Roy. Landseekers from Ohio in 1823 explored a large part of northwestern Indiana and "considered the Shawnee prairie, southeast of Attica, more suitable for settlement than any lands they had seen." Jesse S. Birch, *History of Benton County and Historic Oxford* (Oxford, Ind., 1928), 236.

<sup>9</sup> Attica, on the Wabash River, was the nearest shipping point from Rob Roy and was a flourishing river and canal town in its early days, vying with Lafayette for leadership in river traffic. These corn yields were high but not unusual in the virgin prairie. Shawnee Prairie continued to yield corn, but it was to be another hundred years before these high yields returned, brought about by the scientific use of fertilizer and hybrid seed.

<sup>10</sup> Rob Roy was laid out and recorded July 24, 1828, and enlarged November 13, 1829, for a total of 175 numbered lots. It was situated in the northeast corner of section 30, nestled within the forks of Shawnee Creek. See Deed Book 1, pp. 521, 530, Recorder's Office, Fountain County Courthouse, Covington, Indiana.

<sup>11</sup> William Harrison operated a horse ferry across the Wabash River as early as 1828. It was he who founded Williamsport as William's Port. F. A. Battey & Co., pub., *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton, Indiana* (Chicago, 1883), 86-88.

<sup>12</sup> This route was a portion of the Indian trail which ran from Greenville, Ohio, to Chicago. It entered Warren County, Indiana, just above Pine Creek and traveled northwest past Rainsville into Benton County where it joined the Potawatomi (Ouatanon) Trail to the Illinois state line near the present site of Raub. With time this became the Chicago Road, following the Hubbard Trail north from Bunkum, Illinois. E. Y. Guernsey, *Map of Indiana with Indian trails and villages* (Indiana Department of Conservation Publication No. 132; Indianapolis, 1932); Jesse Setlington Birch, "The Old Chicago Road," *Indiana Magazine of History*, X (December, 1914), 396-98; Elmore Barce and Robert A. Swan, *History of Benton County, Indiana* (3 vols., Fowler, Ind., 1930-1932), I, 58.



consisted of 2 wagons and six yoa<sup>k</sup> of oxon with cows sheepe and young stock—after travling about 10 days we stoped on a streeme or river by the naime of Iroquoise<sup>13</sup> one branch of the Illinois River at a little trading poste known by the naime of Buncom in Iroquoise co Illinois heare father homestided 1.60. achors of wilde and new lande near what was then known as Huberts trading house on the weste side of the Iroquoise river about 2—miles up the river from buncom the present co. seat of Iroquois county Ill<sup>14</sup>—on this track of lande thare was acabon bilte that we wente in to and wente to worke braking perarie and fencing—at this time the potawatomis was plenty hear and some of them at our cabbon every day tho was peasable tho had to be watched—this was the springe and sumer of black hawks ware the sock indians was ciln and runing off all the white inhabents<sup>15</sup> that was then setteld on fox river at what was calde the little woods on fox river<sup>16</sup> the north weste branch of the Ill—River about 60 miles from whear we then lived on the Iroquoise River and the maine road or travel then from Chicago and the little woods on fox River pased rite throe the naborhood or settelment whear we lived and safty was thaught to bee rather unsear-ton tho we remaind thare till in June of the next season 18.32—then

<sup>13</sup> This river heads up in Jasper County, Indiana, and flows west and then north into the Kankakee River just south of Kankakee, Illinois.

<sup>14</sup> In 1832 Iroquois County, Illinois, was still a part of Vermilion County (Illinois) and was not set off until the following year. One of the first settlements in this area was made at Bunkum, on the north side of the Iroquois River. Gurdon S. Hubbard (1802–1886), who traded with the Indians for the American Fur Company, had settled here with others in 1830, but four years later had sold out, given his wife away, and settled in Chicago. H. W. Beckwith, *History of Iroquois County* (Chicago, 1880), 335–36. Joseph's 160-acre homestead must have been located in Section 13 on the west side of the Iroquois River, which runs south-to-north in this vicinity. The name Bunkum was changed to Concord, and a later settlement on the opposite bank was named Montgomery and became the first county seat of Iroquois. Later the county offices were moved to Middleport, which merged with South Middleport and became Watseka in about 1865. Watseka was the name of Hubbard's wife, a Potawatomi Indian. The two settlements of Concord and Montgomery, meanwhile, were combined in name to Iroquois by the Big Four Railroad when it passed through in 1871. Late references have been to "Old Bunkum" rather than Bunkum. James N. Adams, comp., "A List of Illinois Place Names," *Illinois Libraries*, L (April, May, June, 1968), 306.

<sup>15</sup> This "ware," named for Black Hawk, a Sauk chief, lasted from May 14 to August 2, 1832, and was confined to a small area in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, although Indian movements threw the frontier settlers of western Indiana and eastern Illinois into a flurry of alarms. The "main road," Hubbard's Trail, from Chicago to southern Illinois, passed through Bunkum, and all the bad news must have gotten to the Wilkinson family rapidly. On Sunday, May 18, a great Indian scare passed through to all the settlers west of the Wabash. See Cox, *Recollections*, 87; and H. B. Kett & Co., pub., *The History of Ogle County, Illinois . . .* (Chicago, 1878), 275–91. This must have been the last straw for Joseph and Ruth with their family of children because they left within a few days. Joseph never fully recovered from this major defeat, and it may have been the cause of his later difficulties.

<sup>16</sup> See note 24 below.

having all beene sick and down with the ague and milk sick<sup>17</sup> the fall before and with one misfortune and another we became dissatisfied and sold out and gave away about all we ever had and started back to Indiana with one yoke of oxen and one old wagon we stopped near where we had crossed the Wabash river going out in Warren Co near where Wmsport<sup>18</sup> now is the present Co seat then not located the country here was still new and thinly settled here we remained a few days in camp till we could get a location to go into which we got after some time looking round by buying out a man by the name of A—Laffoon<sup>19</sup> got 80. acres of cleared<sup>20</sup> land all timber with a small cabin and a few acres of cleared ground and in corner paid \$300—the land lay about 2 miles from the main road<sup>21</sup> from Wmsport to Danville Ill—here I remained at home with father till the spring after I was 21—years of age in 1834—Now I left home to do for my self with but little means in regard to property or schooling never having but little opportunity of going to school though I could read and write so as to be read— — —then on the 7—of May 1834 I left home in company with 3 of my neighbors to go to Wisconsin lead mines<sup>22</sup> my 3—neighbors each had a wagon and oxen I had no interest in any thing only I was to assist when needed to yoke and manage the teams they was to haul what I had to take That was but little a few cloths and a blanket and a chopping ax—that I supposed I would need when I stopped

<sup>17</sup> Like ague, milk sickness was an ever-present illness that plagued settlers of the Midwest. Often fatal, it was caused by a poison passed through the milk of cows grazing on a form of snakeroot common in woods and uncultivated land. Alton A. Lindsey, ed., *Natural Features of Indiana, 1816–1966* (Indianapolis, 1966), xxv.

<sup>18</sup> Although the initial platting of Williamsport was done in 1828, the town grew very slowly, and by 1832 “there were only about twelve families” in the town. *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton*, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph purchased eighty acres from Anderson (Andrew) Laffoon and his wife, Eleanor, then of Lawrence County, Ohio, on September 17, 1832. The plot was located about one and one half miles west of the center of Williamsport and less than a mile west of the Robb (also called Baumgartner) Cemetery where Joseph is buried. The deed of sale is recorded in Deed Book 1, p. 318, Warren County Recorder's Office, Williamsport, Indiana.

<sup>20</sup> This may refer to the practice of girdling trees in a wooded area to prevent leaf growth and, in time, to kill the trees. Crops were sown between the girdled trees, which were dropped later after the crops were harvested. See Howard Johnson, *A Home in the Woods: Pioneer Life in Indiana* (1951; Bloomington, Ind., 1977), 15. It more likely refers, however, to land acquired by deed rather than by squatting, homesteading, or purchase from the government.

<sup>21</sup> The old road ran from Williamsport west about three miles and then directly southwest to Danville, Illinois.

<sup>22</sup> The lead mining region is an area in northwestern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin. Lead was first found along the Fever River near Galena, Illinois, in the early 1800s (Indians had been mining here for many years), and findings were pushed up into Wisconsin by 1828. Settlers and farmers from Illinois and Indiana made summer pilgrimages to work in the mines and to haul ore to the smelters as well as the refined lead to Galena for shipment. *History of Ogle County, Illinois*, 262–63.

to worke we took the road towards Chicago<sup>23</sup> and pased buncom on the Iriquois river near whear father had lived thare we fell in company with several other wagons and teems moving with thare famlies to the little woods on fox river<sup>24</sup> whear black hawk had done the moste of his murdern and burning that was still anew contry and unseattled in Ill and anice place—mee and one of our company with his wagon and teeme went by chicago with some loding he had for that place Chicago then was but asmall villege<sup>25</sup> we stoped one nite in town slep in our waggon on the north bank of the chicago river beld the oxon and turnd them out to grase the next day we drove on to fox river whear we Joind the reste of our company that was to waite till we came up heare we remaind one day and 2—nites helped some of the moving famlies lay claime foundations and hear ayonge man by the naime of q—m—Hunter Joind our croud for the lead mindes—this parte of Ill then was new and unsettd by white man and no roads of any sorte<sup>26</sup> that we had to sorty gess at our way we wished to stop near Gelena<sup>27</sup> at aplace could counsial hill whear one of the men of our prty had

<sup>23</sup> This road basically followed Hubbard's Trail and passed through or near what are now the Illinois cities of Iroquois, Beaverville, Momence, Grant Park, Crete, Bloom (Chicago Heights), Homewood, and Blue Island before reaching Chicago. Henry E. Hamilton, *Incidents and Events in the Life of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard* (Chicago, 1888), 137.

<sup>24</sup> The area referred to is in the east-central edge of Kane County in St. Charles Township on the east side of Fox River. There were no real settlers here until after Black Hawk's War had ended. The first came in 1834 and were the families of Evan Shelby and William Franklin of Warren County, Indiana, perhaps part of the wagon train with John's three neighbors. John S. Wilcox, ed., *History of Kane County, Illinois* (Chicago, 1904), 718. These would be the "moving families" mentioned later. The Little Woods post office operated in St. Charles Township from 1842 to 1853. *Ibid.*, 41, 680. There were no settlers killed within the limits of what is now Kane County, and the only major massacre of whites during the war occurred down the Fox River in LaSalle County at Indian Creek. Fifteen persons were killed by a small band of mostly Potawatomis. Elmer Baldwin, *History of LaSalle County, Illinois* (Chicago, 1877), 95-106.

<sup>25</sup> Chicago was described in 1834 in a letter by John M. Peck to a friend, and he prophesied that "Chicago will greatly exceed any other place in Illinois," although it was just getting under way in growth and had a population of only about one thousand. "The Future of Chicago—in 1834," *Bulletin of the Chicago Historical Society*, II (March, 1936), 1.

<sup>26</sup> A stage route was to be instituted from Chicago to Savanna, Illinois, within the year. Probably a general route had been traced but was not yet definite enough to be called a road. The best estimate is that they followed a path a few miles south of a beeline from Little Woods to Council Hill. Scott's army road may have been used for part of the way.

<sup>27</sup> Galena, Illinois, originally called La Pointe, was the headquarters and jumping-off point for the general mining area. The town had a population of about one thousand, and one witness reported that "for its size, [it] is one of the busiest places in the Union. . . for a frontier-town, built indifferently of frame and log-houses, thrown confusedly together on the side of a hill. . ." Charles Fenno Hoffman, "Galena," in *Prairie State: Impressions of Illinois, 1673-1967, By Travelers and Other Observers*, ed. and comp. Paul M. Angle (Chicago, 1968), 147.



abrother living that had gone thare some years before we drove on thru the wilde perarie often pasing small streems of watter that was full of nice fish and some nice groves of small timber and passed several indian vilegs tho the indins was potowatmies and Winaba[gos] and was friendly and about the third day we came to the bank of Rock river about 30—miles above Dixon<sup>28</sup> then asmall trading point on the east bank of Rock river and thare was afary kep thare by the olde man Dixon<sup>29</sup> at that time tho whear our party came to the river thare was no place posable to ford or cross tho we happend to finde asquod of potowamies indians thare preparing to move up the river in canoos for the purpes of geathern rice and crambarys and our party not wishing to go down to Dixons to cross I was put forward to make atraid with the Indians to take our wagons over<sup>30</sup> on canoos and we would swim the oxon I was some what aquainted with the potawatomies indians having lived rite amongst them for ayear or more and had learnd some of thare ways and afew wordes of thare language in regard to traid I was put forward to make atraid with the Indians to take the wagons and ox yoaks over on Canoos and we would swim the oxon that I soon acomplished by promising to pay them five Dollars when all was over safe and sound this thay soone done by tying 2 of thare largest canoos togeather side by side then we set off the wagon box and run the wagon on the canoos and thay pold it over and then came back and took the box or head the same way and so forth till all was over then we drove the cattle into the River and got some of the Indians after them in thare small canoos and soone had all saife on the other shore then I paid them the promiced \$5-00—then we set to work and soone had our rig all fixt up and ready for astart and the Indins went on thare way we crossed the River about noone and that eavning we got to anice grove of timber

<sup>28</sup> Their crossing point of Rock River would have been just above what is now Byron in Ogle County, Illinois. It is here that the first bloodshed of Black Hawk's War took place. A group of Major Isaiah [Isaac?] Stillman's drunken Illinois militia disregarded a flag of truce from Black Hawk and attacked the three braves who carried it. This precipitated hostilities, resulting in the utter rout of Stillman's 275-man militia by less than 40 braves. The settlers humorously dubbed the nearby creek, "Stillman's Run." Perry A. Armstrong, *Sauks and the Black Hawk War, with Biographical Sketches, Etc.* (Springfield, Ill., 1887), 310-30.

<sup>29</sup> John Dixon, born in Rye, New York, October 9, 1784, was a founder and developer of Dixon; he took over the Rock River ferry in 1830 and died July 6, 1876, at Dixon. George Lamb, *Historical Reminiscences* (Dixon, Ill., 1970), unpag.

<sup>30</sup> A ford had already been located at Byron, but it may not have been known to John and companions; and it is possible that spring floods had not yet receded by the third week in May. This method of "ferrying" had been practiced by the Indians prior to Dixon's ferry being put into service. If John had used Dixon's ferry, his fees would have been about \$1.75 for each wagon and team. Henry R. Boss, *Sketches of the History of Ogle County, Illinois* (Polo, Ill., 1859), 32-35.

on anice mound whear thare was alarge loge house<sup>31</sup> that some of the settelers had forted in to defend them selvs against the Indians in time of the wore the fort held out—tho the Dore shuter was maid of punchons it was riddeld all to peaces with boolets and the famley left as soone as the Indins had geatherd up the stock and had gone and had not returnd so we took possesion and done well and the next day we begin to come to whear the setelers had returnd and it begin to look more like home we war now beginning to git in to the mining destricts of wisconsin and in about aweeks drive from whear we left the settelment on fox River we came to agrove with afew traiding huts that had beene astablished sence the wore the ws then know by the mame of Council hill<sup>32</sup> about halfe way be tweene Galena and in Ill and Mineral point in Wisconsin<sup>33</sup> heare the teams stoped to look for work now being in the mines of wisconsin and myself and Hunter having no intrust in the teems was footloos and we left Council hill about noone to hunt work took the Road to wardst mineral point about 45 miles distent Mineral point then was known and colde by the inhabents thar shake rage<sup>34</sup>—the first half day we stoped oll nite at ahouse

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<sup>31</sup> As near as can be determined there were no substantial settlements in the area near the west side of Fox River prior to Black Hawk's War. If the wagons were following traces of previous travelers, they would have traveled a little north of west, intersecting the Kellogg Trail at Crane's Grove near present-day Baileyville. This trail then turned more to the north and passed Oliver W. Kellogg's original dwelling and tavern in west-central Stephenson County. John's description of the land and buildings fits very well. Kellogg built it about 1827, sold it in 1831, and the next two owners, Lafayette and Green, apparently did not live there. Western Historical Co., pub., *The History of Stephenson County, Illinois . . .* (Chicago, 1880), 221, 513. At the onset of the war it was used as a storehouse by the army. It was shot up during the Battle of Kellogg's Grove on June 24, 1832, the door being one of the principal targets and retaining bullets for many years. Edward L. Burchard, "Early Trails and Tides of Travel in the Lead Mine and Blackhawk Country," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVII (April, 1924–January, 1925), 591–92. James Timms purchased the property in 1835 and became the first permanent settler in the area, exchanging his squatter's title for a government land patent, August 13, 1844. A large monument southeast of Kent marks the location of this log house and the battle. The distance traveled from the Fox River crossing would have taken about a day and a half, rather than the half-day as remembered by John.

<sup>32</sup> Council Hill is said to have been named from its use for Indian council meetings.

<sup>33</sup> Wisconsin was still a territory, and the large area at its southwest point that included the mine region was under the jurisdiction of Iowa County. See Alice E. Smith, *The History of Wisconsin: Vol. I, From Exploration to Statehood* (Madison, Wisc., 1985), 186.

<sup>34</sup> During the initial years of mining along the hill at Mineral Point, the various cooks in the valley would announce meal time by waving a cloth. Thus the appellation, "Shake Rag under the Hill," shortened to Shake Rag. See Stephen Taylor, "Wisconsin—Its Rise and Progress, with Notices of Mineral Point and Richland County" (*Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Vol. II, No. 15; Madison, 1855), 486.

on one branch or fork of the picatolick river<sup>35</sup> anice cleare streeme full of fish heare next morning I had to pay the bill for us boath Hunter not having a singel dime and I had but little and we had left all we had with the waggons—tho we got off next morning all rite still on the road to wards shake rage whear we arived next day in time to git our dinners at one of the hotells in the town of which thare was too at that time one of them onde and run by a man by the naime of H—niclas the other and whear we had cald or stoped was onde and run by aman by the naime of J. Hood<sup>36</sup> hear we got our dinners with the understandin that we should have work the next day—the town at this time had the too taverns that I have spoke of and too drygoods stors and too groserys and one gamling house too or three black smith shope and some other olde shantys that had beene gotten up<sup>37</sup> sence the indian trouble mineral point is about halfe way betweene galiena and greene bay<sup>38</sup> mineral

<sup>35</sup> This is certainly the Pecatonica River which has branches on both the north-east and the southwest sides of Mineral Point. It was the southern branch that John and his friend crossed. The name is derived from the Indian and early on had various spellings. It appeared as "Peekatolake," in Union Publishing Co., pub., *History of Green County, Wisconsin* (Springfield, Ill., 1884), 125; government surveying notes used this spelling. It was also spelled "Pickatolik" in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., "The Territorial Census for 1836" (*Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Vol. XIII; Madison, 1895), 258. Thus, John's version is not so strange.

<sup>36</sup> "Cap" or "Uncle" Abner Nichols operated the "Mansion House" for many years. He was one of the Cornishmen who gravitated to the mining areas of Wisconsin. His establishment was the larger of the two and took on the aspects of a frontier tavern as well. In the 1836 census, Nichols was listed with forty-six persons while John Hood was listed with only eight, perhaps indicating the relative sizes of their houses. Thwaites, "The Territorial Census for 1836," 261, 263. John and Matilda Hood and their oldest child were the first permanent settlers at Mineral Point. They came from Missouri in the spring of 1828, possibly from the Old Lead Belt of southwestern Missouri in St. Francois and Washington counties. At the time of John Wilkinson's arrival, Matilda was operating one of the two hotels or "houses" in Mineral Point. She was the first of her sex to preside over such an establishment in that area. Matilda was born January 8, 1808, and so in the summer of 1834 she was just twenty-six years of age and only a few years older than her young boarder. She and John Wilkinson apparently got on well. His later reference to her as "my good old landlady," was in comradery rather than in reference to age. Her husband eventually struck a lead vein and did well. He died in 1844, and in 1860 she was operating a prosperous dress shop as well as her boarding house. *History of Green County*, 144; Western Historical Co., pub., *History of Iowa County, Wisconsin* (Chicago, 1881), 656; U.S. Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedules for Iowa County, Wisconsin, p. 187. Her house was described by G. W. Featherstonhaugh as one of two "filthy-looking taverns." Quoted in George Fiedler, *Mineral Point: A History* (Madison, 1973), 62. Featherstonhaugh had visited Mineral Point in May, 1837. Theodore Rodolf, conversely, thought Hood "kept a good house for those times." Theodore Rodolf, "Pioneering in the Wisconsin Lead Region" (*Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Vol. XV; Madison, 1900), 358. Rodolf had stopped in Hood's house in September, 1835.

<sup>37</sup> During Black Hawk's War most of the material of standing habitations was used to build Fort Jackson at Mineral Point to fend off expected Indian attacks. *History of Green County*, 144. Following Black Hawk's defeat, the opposite was hastily carried out.

<sup>38</sup> John probably meant Madison rather than Green Bay, for which his estimate of halfway was not too far off.

point is in adespert rough<sup>39</sup> part of the state tho rich in mineral of several kinde the mineral destrect at that time was taken up and heald by lots tho each one had to improve or work so much all the time on all the lots that he had or claimd unless he could sell to some one and in order to do that it must be improved some then acorden to promice the land lord whear we had stoped over nite took us out next morning and seat us at work on some new lots that he wished to holde or take up and we went to work Diggin and after too and ahalf days work I took the mumps that I had caught on the Road that stoped my work at presant then about 4-00 miles from home and with out adollar to save my hide and had left all the close and all I had brought thare with the wagons and teams at counsell hill but what was on my back Distence 45—miles and—Q.—Hunter had nothing in the world only what he had on his back tho he was still able to work and nock round and still came to see me every-day or too and in afew days he earnd some means and baught him self anew shirt and took the dirty one to the olde wash woman and got it washed and braught it to me to put on and he took my dirty shirt to the wash and left it to bee washed and in about too weeks I was able to gow and git my shirt and leave his to be washed then in about one weeke more I was able to gow to work and the land lady of the tavern wheare I had stoped had got some what aquanted with me while I was poking round with the mumps and she neaded aman to help her in the house and I gist sooted her and I went to worke in the kitchen and staid with her till I paid my bill and got some close of my one tho me and Hunter got seperated tho he got work neare town that we still saw each other every few weeks till in august I setteld up with the land lady and got some monny and then I hierd to a man by the naime of Robert Gray<sup>40</sup> to work on afarme that he had took up and wished to improve I hierd first for one month and after staying thare alone for 2 weeks Gray came to sea how I was gitting alonge and by that time I had got Despert lonson for it was about 14—miles to town and that was the nerest nabors that I had and I tolde Gray when he came dow that I would stay thare no longer alone and when he went back to town he hierd ayonge man by the naime of fillip Bloget<sup>41</sup> rite from ohio to come and work with

<sup>39</sup> The land had been pitted and scarred by prospectors and by miners working claims, and there was little or no agriculture in the immediate vicinity. Contemporary descriptions of Mineral Point are given in Taylor, "Wisconsin—Its Rise and Progress," 480-88; Strange M. Palmer, "Western Wisconsin in 1836" (*Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, Vol. VI; Madison, 1872), 297-302; *History of Iowa County*, 768, *passim*; and Fiedler, *Mineral Point*, 44-60.

<sup>40</sup> Robert W. Gray was one of the very early arrivals in Mineral Point. *History of Iowa County*, 653.

<sup>41</sup> Phillip Blodgett was still in Mineral Point for the territorial census of 1836. Thwaites, "The Territorial Census for 1836," 258.

me till my time would bee out then we had agood time till my month was out—then I and fill as I cald my pardner took agob of Gray to finish the cabing<sup>42</sup> that was gist raisd and coverd on the land that he had taking we was to hew punchons and lay the flore and lofte chunk and dob the cracks with mud and bild astone fier place and stick and clay chimney and shutter to the Dore and git it ready to move into for \$30.00—that we compleated in about one half month. then I went back to town And got work in town for one month of an olde inglish man that had astore in town naimd Enslon<sup>43</sup> the work that I had to do was to Drive ayoke of runaway oxon and a cart to hall mineral from the various pits to the furnes the mineral he got of varrious wons for goods in the store I put in about one halfe the month and got partely sick and quit town againe and hierd for awhile to tend winless<sup>44</sup> by the Day till I could git setteld up and git some little Debts that was coming to me and git alittle stouhter then I intend to start home for I had gist got aletter from my Brother Hiram<sup>45</sup> at home to come home and in the springe he would gow back with me to the mines and git achoole the imployment that he had beene following for sometime and after afew days I got my affairs settled and seat the first tusday in November to start and when the moning had came I got all ready and gave my good olde land lady and some other friends good Bye I started on the road afoot and alone intending to gow by the way of Counsil hill whear I had lefte some things as I had gone out traveld the first day 40 miles staid all nite at a contry tavern one the road kep by aman by the naime of skiner<sup>46</sup> next morning got off with my feete purty sore it now in the fall of 1834—stoped and counsil hill got my blanket and ax and had a gow with an olde woman about the ax tho I satisfed her that the ax was mine and solde it to aman by the naine of Hill for 50 cts and tied the blanket on my napsack—knot noing but I should have to sleep out some nits and mite nead it—from thare I took a cross the contry to strike the stage rout<sup>47</sup> from Gallena to Dixon on Rock river got in to the

<sup>42</sup> A good description of a typical cabin and its construction is contained in Johnson, *A Home in the Woods*, 6-12.

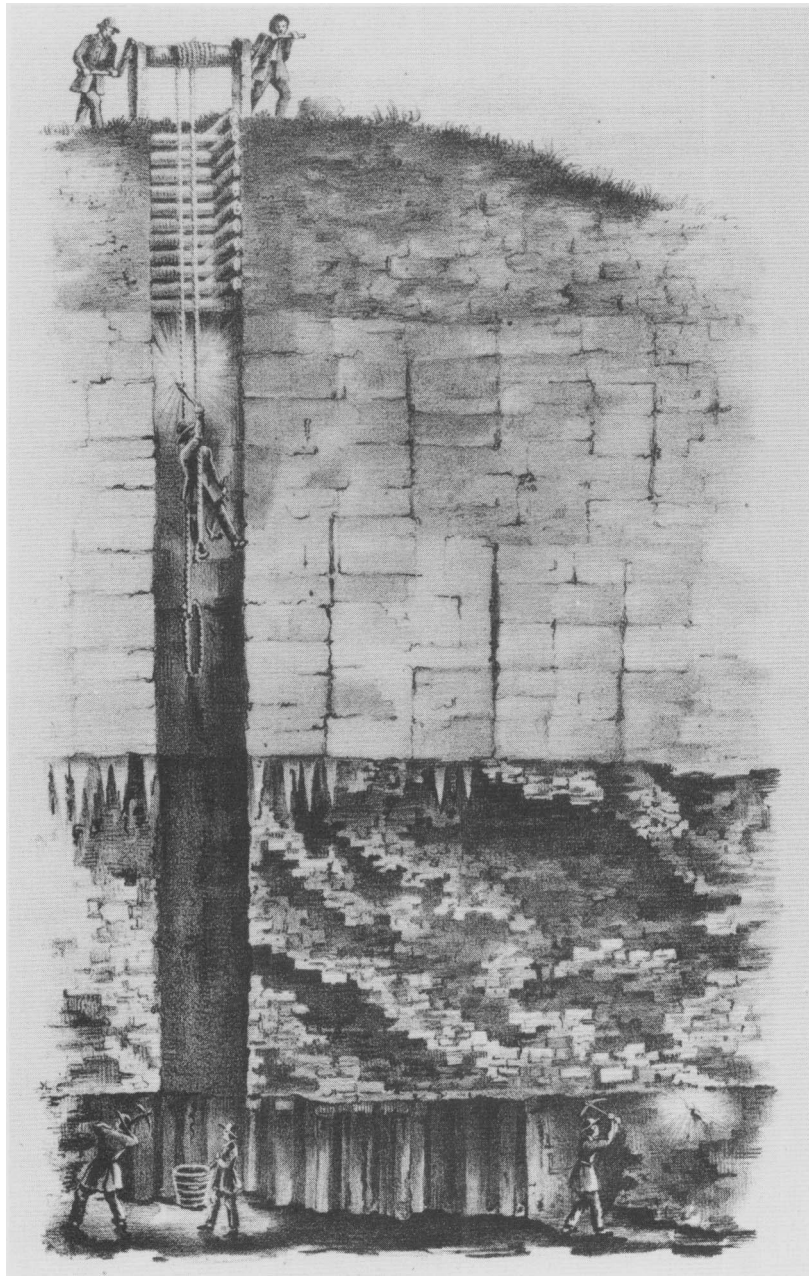
<sup>43</sup> In 1829 John D. Ansley opened a supply store. *History of Iowa County*, 657. He also acted as county clerk. "Minute Book, Iowa County (Proc. of Iowa County Board of Supervisors)" (*Wisconsin Territorial Papers, County Series*, Vol. I, No. 2; Madison, 1942), 14.

<sup>44</sup> A windlass was used to lower the workers into the mine and to bring up lead ore. A description of a mine at that time is contained in Hoffman, "Galena," 150-51.

<sup>45</sup> Hiram Wilkinson was John's older brother.

<sup>46</sup> John B. Skinner was an early miner in the area, operating primarily in what is now Greene County, northwest of Monroe, Wisconsin. The location of Skinner's House is pinpointed in *History of Green County*, 195, although this location seems out of the way for a direct track from Mineral Point to Council Hill.

<sup>47</sup> By this year, there were numerous roads or trails leading from southern Illinois to the lead region, and stages were already using some of them. This line was probably following the Kellogg Trail, one of the earliest. Charles K. Carpenter, *The Early History of Northern Illinois* (Mount Morris, Ill., 1948), 76.



### LEAD MINE FROM THE ILLINOIS-WISCONSIN REGION, 1839

David Dale Owen, *Report of a Geological Exploration of Part of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, Made under Instructions from the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, in the Autumn of the Year 1839; with Charts and Illustrations*. Senate Report 407, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 1843-1844 (serial set 437).

road at nite and stoped at the stage office kep by Mr Winters<sup>48</sup> the stage went out next morning to Dixon 50—miles so I took passage on the stage paid \$3.00 to Dixon thare I stoped the 3 nite that I was on the road home at Dixon the stage went out next morning at 3.0 clock and I wroad agine till noone 30. miles then I left the stage rout and took it afoot to wards Henopin<sup>49</sup> on the Ill. river stoped the 4—nite about 5—miles East of the river on anice perarie cald oxbow perarie<sup>50</sup>—at this time Roads was pore and the Contry now and thinley setteld tho I took the rout or path by the way of Booming grove as it was then known now Bloomington Ill and I traved on foot and alone all the waye home 4.00 miles in 9 Days<sup>51</sup> found fthers famley still all aliving and well on the olde place wheare they was when I left in the springe of 1834—Now having beene gone about 7—months and that fall I waid 160 lbs when at home thare was nothing thare for me to Do—and I hierd to anolde yankey cooper by traid to saw with acrosscut saw with ayounge man by the name of John Maracal<sup>52</sup> for half mont then when my time was out I took agobe of cuting corde wood 30 1/3 cts per corde for the same olde man by the name of John Norton<sup>53</sup> put up 30—cordes of wood then in the springe of 18.35 I wente to the river to work on flat bottomd or New orleane boats<sup>54</sup> bilt for the purpis of carrien produce to market I worked at that bisness till some time in may 18.35 I hierd to aman by the naime of Cortlan Losson<sup>55</sup> to

<sup>48</sup> John D. Winters was a well-known early settler and businessman in Jo Daviess County, Illinois. He had taken over operation of the mail route in 1832 and shortly thereafter started a stage route from Rockford to Galena. His home with its stagehouse-tavern was located on the hill just east of Elizabeth on the edge of Woodbine Township. H. F. Kett & Co., pub., *The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois* . . . (Chicago, 1878), 284, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> Hennepin, county seat of Putnam County, is located on the Illinois River.

<sup>50</sup> Oxbow Prairie was located in the south-central part of Putnam County between Magnolia and the Fox River.

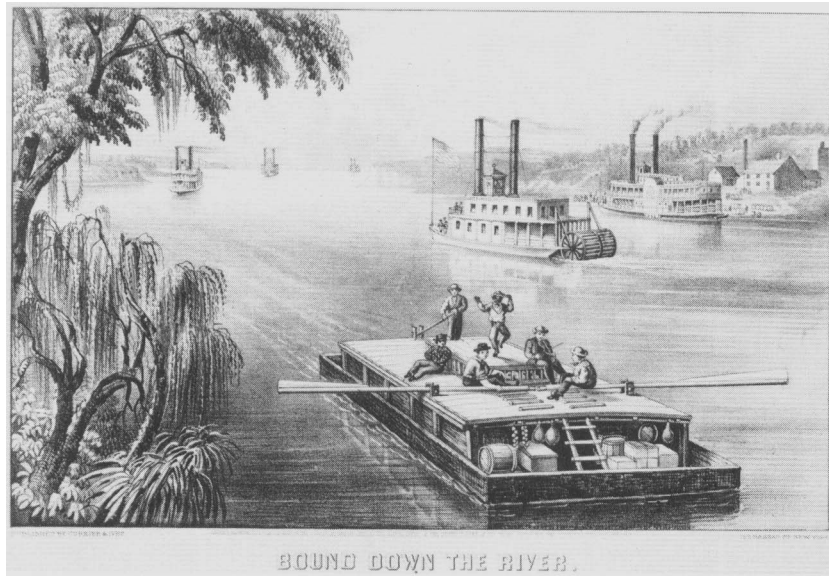
<sup>51</sup> John seems to have rounded up the mileage. A good walking pace of 4 miles per hour for a 9-hour day totals to 324 miles in 9 days. Over much of his journey he would have been following what were then called roads. The mileage of his approximate route is just over 300 miles.

<sup>52</sup> John Merical was a voter in the 1836 election in Washington Township, Warren County. *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton*, 50.

<sup>53</sup> By 1831, John Norton was an early settler and landowner in Steuben Township of Warren County. Warren County Historical Society, pub., *History of Warren County, Indiana* (Williamsport, Ind., 1966), 103.

<sup>54</sup> Thousands of flatboats made the one-way trip from Ohio and Mississippi river ports each year; the average travel time from Louisville was about one month. They were 12 to 15 feet wide and often 50 feet long. Many were swamped and sunk before reaching their destination. See Louis A. Warren, *Lincoln's Youth: Indiana Years, Seven to Twenty-one, 1816–1830* (New York, 1959), 177, 259–60; Albert E. Fossier, *New Orleans: The Glamour Period, 1800–1840* (New York, 1957), 24–25.

<sup>55</sup> Courtlandt Lawson had opened a grocery in 1834 with foreign and domestic groceries. *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton*, 88.



### FLATBOATING TO NEW ORLEANS

Courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.



### FLATBOATS AND SQUARE-RIGGERS ON THE NEW ORLEANS WATERFRONT, EARLY 1830S

Courtesy Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane  
University, New Orleans, Louisiana.



help as abow hand to run one of those Boats to the sitty of new orleans<sup>56</sup> for the some of \$50—00 to be paid when the boat was tide to the warfe safe at the sitty of new orleans and in a bout 3—weeks floting we tide up to one of the worfes at the Citty and I got my pay \$50—00 And once more was foot loose to look out for my self now about too thousand miles from home and the colery des-pert bad<sup>57</sup> and at that time thare was over 900 large ships<sup>58</sup> thare from the otian to lode and un load some from nearly every nation under the sone I was in the citty about 9. days then I got pasage on alarge steeme boat for ivens ville on the ohio river in the staite of Indiana paid \$7.00 on Deck and founde my one grube and slep on aborde on ablanket of my one the boat that I was on was alarge boat 8—boilars side whees naime Ellon Douglas<sup>59</sup> hade on about 300—Deck pasengers whene she lefte the Citty of New orleans was a bout 7 Days toEvans ville Indiana barrid one with cllery<sup>60</sup> I lefte the boat in the nite wente up in town saide all nite

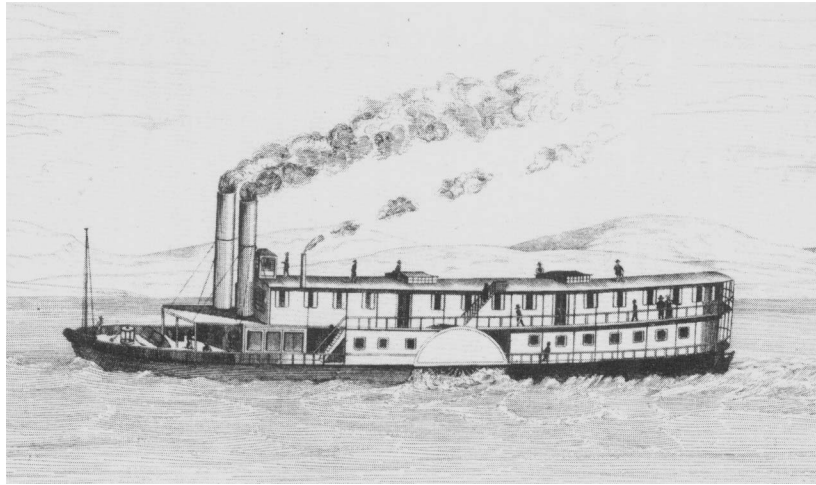
<sup>56</sup> New Orleans was in a boom period of population and shipping growth at this time. In 1835 it was a major city with paved streets, a large business area, and a heterogenous population. It must have been an eye-opening visit for John Wilkinson from the frontiers of the Midwest.

<sup>57</sup> Asiatic cholera had entered the North American continent through Canada in 1832. It spread to Chicago and proceeded down the Mississippi Valley reaching New Orleans in the fall of 1832 and played havoc with the population of 55,000. It reappeared in 1833 and was seriously prevalent until about 1850 when it was finally brought under control. See John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (Urbana, Ill., 1990), 79-91. In 1835 it was probably still a topic in New Orleans. Cholera had struck in the Mineral Point area, having been brought into the lead mines area by General Winfield Scott's army during Black Hawk's War in 1832. "In 1834, the people were afflicted with the cholera which raged here for a considerable time." *History of Iowa County*, 660.

<sup>58</sup> It is not likely that there were this many "large ships" in port unless the count included flatboats. The port, however, was booming, and to the untutored eye the masts of the many sailing ships must have been countless.

<sup>59</sup> The steamboat *Ellen Douglas* was built in New Albany, Indiana, in 1834, although based in New Orleans. She was a sidewheeler of 270 tons, 150 feet long, and had two decks, with cabins on the second deck, all of which placed her in the category of large steamers of that era. Owned by her captain, John Riley of New Orleans, the *Ellen Douglas* operated until 1842 when she was abandoned. The average life of a steamboat at this time was five years; they wore out and were abandoned, if they had not already exploded and burned. "The Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States, 1790-1868," The Lytle-Holdcamper List and the steamboat enrollment records of New Orleans. This information was furnished by the Inland Rivers Library, Cincinnati, Ohio. The first steamer run from New Orleans to Louisville had been made only twenty years earlier, in 1815, but soon the round trip was regularly made in less than one month. By 1835, the up-river speed was about six miles per hour and down-river about twice as fast. The *Ellen Douglas* arrived in New Orleans on May 18, 1835, and probably John's flatboat had docked only a day or two previously. The turnaround time for unloading and loading was about one week. The cost of deck passage was one-fourth cabin class, hence John's choice. "The deck is covered and contains berths, but it is a very undesirable way of travelling." *Wheeling Gazette*, quoted in New Orleans *The Bee*, May 21, 1835. A daily newspaper column, called the "Marine Journal," carried shipping news.

<sup>60</sup> It would seem that cholera was still moving up and down the river.



EARLY STEAMBOAT OF THE *ELLEN DOUGLAS* PERIOD, 1830s

Courtesy Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

gote on awagon nexte moninge to wride to tariehoot<sup>61</sup> about 60—miles paid five Dollars and bording my self coste \$2 + 00 at tarihoot I got on aboate going up the wabash to Wmsporte my home in the caben for \$3.00 about 60 miles rune up to priesvill<sup>62</sup> and woulde grow no further thare I got on another boate for one dollar to Wmsporte 18—miles landed safe at home gone about 2 months founde them all alive and well then it was some time in June and I hierd to a farmer for fifty cts per day to hoe corne while hoinge thare was amane came to see me to git me to worke with tooles on agobe of bildinge a large fraime house for astore in the town of atica on the easte banke of the wabash river in fountain Co—Indiana then but a villege in 18,35 the man was by the name of Wm barkshire<sup>63</sup> I hierde to him to worke till fall for \$11 per month comenste the laste of June—18.35. In the fall of the same year barkshier got worke in Wms porte the conty seate of warren

<sup>61</sup> The year 1832 was important to Terre Haute as it became an incorporated town with a population of about 600. S. B. Gookins, *History of Vigo County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1880), 86.

<sup>62</sup> This must be Perrysville, a small village situated on the west bank of the Wabash River in Vermillion County, about twenty-one miles down river from Williamsport.

<sup>63</sup> A William Berkshire was listed in the 1830 census of Fountain County. U.S., Fifth Census, 1830, Population Schedules for Fountain County, Indiana, p. 266. William Barkshire and William Barkshire, Sr., were voters in Washington Township, Warren County, in 1836. *Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper, and Newton*, 50.

Co indiana and moved thare and tooke me alonge still workinge with tooles at aleven Dollars per month then in the springe of 18.36—I still worked with the same tho he tooke in apartner by the name of Robert pearson<sup>64</sup>—and thay raised my wages to \$16—per month and I worked all that sumer and the winter for the same too men the in the springe of 18.37 I still agreed to stay with the saime partys and thay agreed to raise my wages to \$32—per month then in the fall of 18.37—the 16th of november I was married to agirle in the country by the name of Mary Jane higenbotham<sup>65</sup> she was borne in brown co ohio in the year 18.16—December the 29—then in the springe of 18.38 we wente on to aplace in the contry<sup>66</sup> that I had got of my brother Hiram—aparte of Fathers olde place 40. achors—I bilte abige loge house on the lande planted anorched and Digid awell and Done some other worke and while thare our firste Childe was borne august the 2—18,38—agirle we naimed her Elizabeth Marry—then I lefte that place and wente on to a 10—achor lot<sup>67</sup> that I hade baught still in the same naborhood paid \$1.00 thare I had bilte agoodsised hewed lowge house and Digid awell and planted an orched and put agood raile fence rounde the hole 10—achors and bilte ashead for ashop thare was borne the 2 second Childe aboy—February the 23 18,40 calde his naime Allon Dixon thene we remaind thare till our famley hade increaste to 6 Children 3 girles and 3 boys, tho 2 of they boyes was barried thare Died when small—tho neve forgotten by me—then we remainde thare in Warren county afte we was married about 10—years and I worked the moste of the time at my traide and learnde to make chears and bige wheels to spin wool on then in the fall of 48 I solde the 40 achors of lande to aman by the name of—McGruder<sup>68</sup> for \$5.00 and lefte the 10 acors<sup>69</sup> for mother and 2 single sisters to live on Fathe hade beene Dead<sup>70</sup> fore some time and hade Drinked up and spent all that

<sup>64</sup> Robert Pearson, a carpenter and joiner, "was a fine mechanic," who came to Warren County from Delaware in 1835. *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Jane Higginbotham was the daughter of John Higginbotham and Jane Reed. She died February 2, 1875, in Appanoose County, Iowa.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph had sold his eighty acres to his eldest son Hiram July 14, 1834, and in turn Hiram had sold John an undivided half of it in 1837. Apparently John built and lived on his east half. Recorder's Office, Warren County Courthouse, Williamsport, Indiana.

<sup>67</sup> John purchased this from Isaac Crumpton in 1837. It was a half-mile east of his forty acres. *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> The sale was made by John and Mary Jane to Hezekiah Magruder on September 5, 1848, for \$500.00. *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> In the 1850 census, Ruth Wilkinson and her two unmarried daughters, Amy and Harriet, are listed in Warren County, Washington Township. U.S., Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedules for Warren County, Indiana, p. 5. John sold this property in 1856 when his mother and sisters joined him in Iowa.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Wilkinson died in 1841 and is buried in the Robb Cemetery. Rosella Jenkins, *Inscriptions from Warren County, Indiana, Cemeteries* (3 vols., Williamsport, Ind., 1986), III, 6.

himselfe and famly had ever maide law whate a life—then in the springe of 49—I baught awagon and teeme of 2 horses and came to Iowa appanoose co<sup>71</sup> with wife and 4 children 3—girles and 1—boy all to small to helpe me varry much tho I gote me a claime and wente to worke, we after travlin about 2—weeke stoped in appanoose co—Iowa on the third Daye of July 18,49 at Wm Swanks<sup>72</sup> that had came to this contry some time be fore we was well aquainted with them in Indiana this conty then was new and the land then not in market that is it coulde not be enterd tho about all clamed and healde by amoblaw<sup>73</sup> by the olde settelars I after some time rominge rounde I gote leave to bilde and ocapie ascope of union improved land that had beene taken up or claimed by aman by the naime of Wm buskirk<sup>74</sup> I was to Dead asearton amounte and give him one halfe when it came in to maket he was to holde it cleare by or with the mobe till I coulde git adead for it and it came in to market or coulde bee enterd the scond winter after I came about 18.51—I had brought asolger wrrent with me from Indina for 1.60—achors of govermente lande paid \$130. The land office then was at fairfield<sup>75</sup> wheare I wente to enter my lande thar I baugh another 1.60 achor warrente paid one hundred and 25\$—the too warrents Deaded giste onehalf section or 3.20—achors then I deaded 3 forties or 102 achors then I trided rounde till I hade giste 300 achors of wilde and unimproved land mostly perarie and hasle brush tho thare was some timber on anice branch that run throe the brush and timber tho wente Dry in the fall and frose Drye in the winter I had now laide out all the monny that I hade braught with me and got all the lande that I thaught I neaded or cood ever fence and git imprved I then wente Oo worke and got up acaben coverd with clabords and planke flore

<sup>71</sup> Appanoose County, Iowa, was organized in 1846. John worked as a carpenter in Center Township in 1850. According to family records, he was followed to Iowa by his younger brother Seth and family, and by his sister Marie and brother-in-law David McConnell. His mother and two other sisters, Amy and Harriet, also arrived there some years later. Ruth and Amy returned to Indiana, but Harriet eventually married and remained in Iowa. Three of John's siblings, Hiram, William, and Margaret, remained in Warren and Benton counties, Indiana.

<sup>72</sup> William and Elizabeth Swank and family were living in Udel Township, Appanoose County, in 1860. They had come to Iowa in 1846 from Warren County, Indiana. A. T. Andrews, *Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, 1875), 544.

<sup>73</sup> The early settlers of unsold public lands had loose organizations that, as a group, frowned upon land speculators outbidding an actual settler who was living on the land when it came up for sale. The group frown was generally adequate. In Appanoose County, because of the Claim Protection Society, "to the credit of Appanoose, be it said that very few disputes arose, and these were entirely bloodless." Interstate Publishing Co., pub., *Biographical and Historical Record of Wayne and Appanoose Counties, Iowa* (Chicago, 1886), 673.

<sup>74</sup> A William Van Buskirk married Sarah Johnson, August 19, 1847, in Appanoose County, Iowa. *Ibid.*, 691.

<sup>75</sup> Fairfield is the county seat of Jefferson County, Iowa. The land office moved there from Burlington in 1842. *Historical Atlas of Iowa*, 465.



JOHN WILKINSON AND ANTHRITE DERRICKSON WILKINSON,  
MOULTON, IOWA, C. 1879

Courtesy William C. Wilkinson.

there was amille then giste put by aman by the name of Glass on sharndon River<sup>76</sup> about 3 miles of me that was sawinge lumber that I gote to lay my flore and make ashuter to the Dore of my caben then in 18.52 I had Rails splite and out to fence 6—achors of pearia that I got broke with an oختهem by aman by the name of Sellars—paid \$12 in golde raised corne and foder to feede my stock with what wilde hay I made with asithe that next winter, the next winter 18.53 was Despert colde and that springe it was wet so that it was imposable to git in the fielde to plante anythinge till in July Then there was smart of corne planted tho maid nothinge from the fact that froste came Early and I with the reste raised nothing tho with cear and the youse of my tools I manage to live paid that next springe \$1.00 per bushell for corne about this time one of my horses had Died that left me with out ateeme tho after a time I manage to git holte of ayoke of oxon that I got my wood up with and hald railes out and fenst more ground and got it broke for my worke with tooles I coulde git one achor of peria broke for too days work—<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Emabus Glass and family were living near John in Douglas Township, Appanoose County, in 1860. He was the township supervisor in 1861. *Ibid.*, 707; U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, Population Schedules for Appanoose County, Iowa, p. 52. The Chariton River flows southeast through Appanoose County, eventually emptying into the Mississippi River.

<sup>77</sup> John Wilkinson and family were living in Douglas Township, Appanoose County, Iowa, in 1875. He was noted as born in Ross County, Ohio, and living in Section 13, post office, Unionville. A. T. Andrews, *Historical Atlas*. His wife, Mary Jane, died that year and, after four years of widowhood, John married Anthrite Derrickson, August 13, 1879.