

## A Trip on the Raging Canal in 1848.

### A Letter from William Gooding, Canal Engineer, to his wife, Anne.



This letter is from *Life Thoughts from the Private Papers of our Beloved Father* by William Gooding, 1826-1877.

1886 - E. B. Thayer  
Wausau, Wisconsin

CHICAGO, Nov. 30, 1848.

Dear \*Ann-

- After countless perils "by flood and field" I arrived here yesterday at four o'clock p.m. precisely, and having now so far recovered my faculties that I can again wield the pen, and Mr. Salstonstall being absent at his *thanksgiving dinner*, I seize upon the present moment to let you know how I got here.

When we first left port there was nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, so far as we, with our limited vision could perceive, which portended such awful calamities as befell us. It is true that we had one horse in our team "vot wouldn't go" and a driver as obstinate as the horse and a great deal less sensible. It is true, also, that the hands on board, and the man called Captain, were awful hard cases and did not seem to be very anxious about getting along; and further, that there was a villainous smell of whiskey and tobacco not at all agreeable to one like myself, not in the *constant* use of them; but all this we could have borne until we ascertained that there was not a mouthful of *provisions* on board except a little ginger bread, which a poor, half-starved, cadaverous looking passenger had thoughtfully stuffed into his pockets. What was to be done in this fearful emergency? There we were upon the "raging canal," making headway *occasionally* at the rate say, of one knot per hour, with threatening skies overhead (for night had set in dark and gloomy) and frowning rocks on both sides! Such was our condition when we arrived in sight of the classic village of Athens [present-day Lemont]. As soon as the boat touched shore Lem Norton and myself guided by a dim and distant light pushed forward under a full press of sail to Lem Brown's, resolved to get something to eat or sink in the bottomless mud through which we were, up to our knees in the fluid, plowing our way. Here we got a cup of tea, some bread and *head-cheese*, which forcible reminded me of Roscoe and Board's Hotel. Some of the other passengers and the boat's crew laid in supplies here, but only in such moderate quantities as their stomachs would hold, poor credulous souls, fondly believing, no doubt, that in the morning they would be where provisions could be easily obtained.

During the night the obstinate horse and driver had various *tantrums* which greatly retarded our progress and when we got to Summit our lights went out and we laid by till morning, fearing that we should be cast away if we proceeded, the wind having, in the meantime, freshened to a gale.

Nearly an hour after daylight I succeeded in rousing the boat's crew who seemed strongly inclined to take a Rip Van Winkle snooze, and having secured a pocket full of crackers at an Irish grocery, I again embarked and we proceeded on our voyage.

By this time the rain descended in torrents, the driver swore like a man-of-war's man and the stubborn horse, after getting within a mile of Bridgeport, refused to budge an inch further. In process of time, however, we made another start, reached Bridgeport, got some more *head-cheese* of extremely doubtful quality and the boat was laid up for the day. Here was a fix, but I succeeded in getting a horse and one wagon and got to the city precisely at the time mentioned at the commencement of my epistle, having faced the worst storm I was ever out in. ~ \* Ann, as in original letter, or Anne