

Locating the Town Site of Watertown

There was a fever to locate town sites all over the country west of the Mississippi River. Minneapolis parties went out in every direction from 30 to 60 miles looking for suitable locations to start new towns.

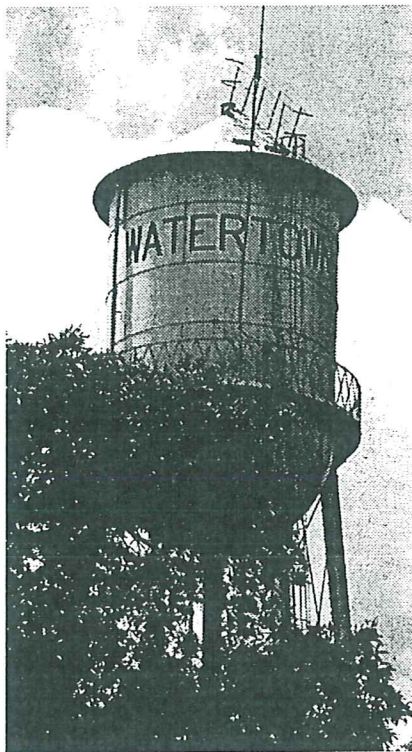
A group of Isaac I. Lewis' friends proposed a trip in February, 1856 by way of Glencoe in search of the Pipe Stone County. The party was made up of 1) Isaac B. Edwards, 2) Curtis H. Pettit, 3) Levi M. Green, 4) one other man and 5) Isaac I. Lewis. They rigged up a two-horse sled with a wagon box to carry supplies, which included a tent, poles, cooking utensils, axes, guns, ammunition and plenty of provisions.

The first day out they reached Carver. The next day they reached Glencoe and stayed at a frontier hotel. There they met John McLeod to accompany them as a guide. The next day they started out at noon and arrived on a prairie going in a westerly direction to an isolated grove of timber where there was a small lake. They camped and hunted around in the woods. The next day they started across an open wild prairie where snow had drifted and hardened. In the afternoon, it clouded up and the wind fiercely blew (blizzard). When they looked over the prairie it was like looking over an ocean as far as the eyes could see. When they were nearly out of sight of the trees they came to a halt and decided what was best to do. They decided that to go ahead would endanger their lives. They turned around and made for the trees as fast as possible, reaching there before dark.

Two men used shovels to clear away a spot large enough to pitch the tent. Two other men chopped down trees for fire wood while one attended to the horses and the others looked for water. A nearby lake was frozen solid to the ground. There was no water to be had. After pitching the tent, they made a rousing big fire. After supper, Isaac melted snow in the coffee pot for themselves and the horses. Old man Edwards was continually finding fault with first one and then another, which kept the camp in an uproar of laughter all evening. They later learned that the mercury stood at 29 below that night at Glencoe.

The next morning they started back on a shorter and better route to Glencoe. Mr. McLeod knew of settlers living 10 miles south where they would run into a fixed road leading to Glencoe.

On arriving back in Minneapolis, they found out that Alexander Moore and David Bickford had made a trip out west into the Big Woods, striking the Crow River where Rockford is now. They had traveled the river on ice 12 to 14 miles to a lovely place due west of Minneapolis. On the banks of the river, where the soil was exposed, it was deep and rich. They camped two nights and marked claims on both sides of the river. There was quite a little rapids just above their camp, which afterward gave the town site the name of "Rapid City."



On hearing Alexander Moore's and David Bickford's report of the fine location, 10 men formed a Company: 1) John H. Stevens, 2) H.B. Hancock, 3) Alexander Moore, 4) David Bickford, 5) Henry Chambers, 6) Isaac B. Edwards, 7) M. C. Baker, 8) Lewis Herrington, 9) Henry King and 10) Isaac I. Lewis. At that time the town site was to be known as "Union City" with Isaac I. Lewis as secretary of the Company.

Upon reaching the town site, they built four cabins in four quarter sections, which happened to be in the middle of the town site. In April, 1856, the Company hired men and teams to cut a road from Irvin Threwhbury's place, a distance of 12 miles to the town site. The two two-horse teams were used to haul the fallen timber out of the roadway. When they reached the town site, they found it was just 30 miles due west of Minneapolis by section lines.

The Company built a log hotel. Alexander Moore put in a saw mill. Isaac Lewis built a small frame store and took out stock and sent for his father, Caleb Lewis, who was in Illinois, to keep the store for the remainder of

the winter (1856-57). In 1857, brother Eli came from Wisconsin to visit Watertown, liked it and wanted to go there if they could arrange matters. The Company wanted a bridge over the Crow River so Isaac gave Eli the contract to do the work. On March 17, 1857, Isaac turned over the store to Eli for an invoice amount of \$1,167. On Dec. 28, 1858, Isaac packed up his family from Minneapolis and moved to Watertown. They arrived at the Watertown Hotel on Dec. 29, 1858, where they took up residence for some years.

R.J. Mendenhall was hired to survey the town site, but did not finish it. The Company employed Robert H. Blanding, who finished the survey with the name of the town site being changed to Watertown on July 21, 1858. On Sept. 25, 1858, Caleb Lewis, as owner and proprietor of the town site, filed the survey and plat for record at Chaska (county seat of Carver County.)

The manner in which the Lewis' obtained title of the 640 acres was by pre-emption and a Sioux half breed Indian scrip of 160 acres in the name of J.J. Frazier. Acting for the Company, Isaac Lewis bought from H.S. Sibley at Mendota, 320 acres of scrip at \$5 per acre and laid one half of the town site in the name of Caleb Lewis, who pre-empted one quarter section (80 acres) and Jabez Tuey another 80 acres. The Lewises gave Tuey the money to pre-empt with and then paid him \$150 for making deeds of his land to Caleb Lewis. This threw the title of the whole town site into Caleb Lewis' name. It was just after the title had been secured and placed in Caleb's name that the plat was recorded.

References: Isaac I. Lewis Diary -Plat Map - and Abstracts.

(Note: The Watertown Area Historical Society will have pictures of some of the early settlers on display in the Community Center during the Rails to Trails Festival.)