CHAPTER VI

HOME IN AMERICA

The date of arrival at the PeardOn cabin, June 7, was too late for the sowing of wheat, oats or barley. It was even too late to plant corn of the varieties in common use at that time. Today, June 10th is about the right date for planting corn, but the corn or 1849 was a slow growing, late ripening crop, which should be planted in mid-May if it was to ripen before frosts came, in the ordinary year. However, there was still time to cut hay and hay was an important item in the wintering of horses and cattle. So, John Baker lost little time before seeking a farm to buy.

With Peardon to guide them, John and "little Bill" walked through the woods and across the hills and valleys which in later years became known as the "Kettle Moraine", much of which now is a State Park. They were headed toward a farm which was reputed to bear "bur oak or white oak" and was also served by “living water". The latter could obviate the otherwise necessity of digging a well and the not inconsiderable labor of drawing water daily for the cattle. This farm was owned, along with considerable other acreage by a speculating "Yankee" who had over-extended his resources and was forced to sell some of his holdings if he were to pay for the remainder. So the diary bears the following entry:-

“June 23, 1849

Bought of Mr. Francis Draper two farms of land containing 192 acres together with a quarter part of all crops now on farm to be delivered to me in half bushel after harvest with half the hay and the pump and all the timber an rails now on the farms with the use of the grainery after harvest an immediate possession of the dwelling house on the Buck lot for the sum of 310 sovereigns Paid Mr. Francis Draper one sovereign in part pay in the presence of Mr. John Chapman"

The original entry was made in lead pencil but was transcribed in ink at the book of the book.

Details of this entry indicate that John had been warned against "Yankee tricks". There had been cases in which a buyer on taking possession, found his farm stripped of fence rails. Rails would sell for ready money, as well as the better,

accessible timber. I have no idea of the sort of pump involved (they were rare in those days) nor where the well was located, I am under the impression that they depended on springs for domestic water and that the cattle drank out of the creek which flowed through the property. The delivery of the crop "in half bushel" probably is a description of how the crop would be measured in dividing it.

In another place it will appear that these two farms contained 206 acres instead of 192. Whether additional land, was acquired later or a survey revealed the area to be larger, I do not know. A difference of fourteen acres is too much to have gone unnoticed for it was the equivalent of one-third of the ordinary farm in 1849. In those days, with both sowing and reaping done by hand, forty acres was enough for one man to cultivate. Money was so scarce and interest rates so high that the usual “shotgun and axe" farmer dared not and could not obligate himself for more. Besides his cattle could graze in the unfenced, wild meadows and he could shoot much of his meat. In this setting John Baker must have appeared as a man of means.

The "dwelling house on the Buck lot" was a log cabin with a loft, and a fireplace much like those in England except that it was much larger. The roof consisted of split shingles – “shakes” they are called in California - which would shed rain but were not and tight. The boys slept on the floor of the loft and I remember my father telling me that many a morning in winter he had found a considerable pile of dry snow on his bed-covers, snow which had sifted between or under the shingles because of the force of the wind. The chimney of the fire-place was so large that a boy lying on his back on the hearth could see stars in the sky in the day time. And at night it was one of the pleasures of a small boy to push himself close enough to the fire so that he could look up the chimney and see the sparks flying out into the dark.

The “Buck lot” was located diagonally across the highway from the present "Baker schoolhouse". The cabin stood underneath a leaning burr oak tree perhaps fifty feet from the border of the highway. Until a few years ago, that tree was still standing, having been left, partly, as a sentimental reminder and partly as shade for grazing cattle. Father once remarked about the fun of climbing up the tree and then letting a stone down the chimney by a string, which was intended to produce a

scolding from his mother. However, sometimes is brought out his big sister, Mary Jane, and she was likely to "lay on hands", which wasn't so much fun.

By 1849 the Indians had been removed from this part of Wisconsin as much as fifteen years. Settlers had poured in from Ohio, New York, Connecticut, and other eastern states to such an extent that Wisconsin had been admitted as a state during the preceding year. But still, pioneer conditions prevailed. On the drive from Milwaukee to Melendy's Prairie, Grace was in frequent fear of Indians; the bare-footed, sun-tanned men which they encountered occasionally, she was sure were Indians. In later years an occasional Indian trapper would come to her door and ask for bread. She did not hesitate in giving him a loaf. I remember father telling me about visiting the camp of a French-Canadian and an Indian, who had built them a brush “wiki-up” as shelter near the marsh on wooded land which we later called “the island" (Because it was out off from the rest of our farm by the marsh); and how this pair of trappers offered him roasted muskrat to eat. He claimed that it wouldn't have tasted bad if they had salted it.

During the period before the Indians were removed, they had yearly in the autumn fired the wild hay which was luxuriant on the flat areas. This had three effects: first it drove the game to trails along which the hunters took positions; second it burned off small brush, thus preserving the area as grass land; third, it removed the old grass cover, so that the new growth in the spring made good grazing for buffalo and deer. Thus, the typical flat areas known as Eagle Prairie, North Prairie, Little Prairie, Heart Prairie, etc. were not forested, except for the occasional burr oak or white oak which were big enough to withstand the annual fire. They were ready for the plough without the back-breaking labor of cutting trees and disposing of the wood and brush. Such portions as were not ploughed, furnished hay for the pioneer's cattle and sheep.

But by 1849, fourteen years had passed without the annual burning. From somewhere, acorns of the black oak became scattered over much of the area adjoining the Kettle Moraine. These acorns sprouted, the sprouts pushed their way through the grass und once they got higher than the hay, they grew rapidly. Deer browsed them back somewhat, but as the root system strengthened the young oak bushed out so that the browsing was confined to the outer branches, leaving the

central ones to grow tall. I have heard father say that they were "thick as hair on a dog's back", and being so thick, and growing toward the light, they grew tall rather than bushy and the lower limbs, dying from lack of light, fell off. So, when John Baker moved into the “dwelling” on the Buck lot, most of the unploughed area found about was covered by a growth of black oak each “about as thick as your thumb" and nothing so large that it could not be “turned under by a breaking plow".

What was a "breaking plow”? A breaking ploy was like an ordinary "walking" plow in form, but made heavier and stronger in every respect. I remember seeing an old one in Uncle Will Baker's yard. It would tum a 14-inch furrow and run from six to nine inches deep. Three or more yoke of oxen (six oxen) were hitched to it, one man drove the oxen, one held the handles of the plow and another "rode" the beam to keep the plow down to its proper depth in the ground. (The beam is the part of the plow to which the oxen are hitched at one end and to which the "plow" and the handles are attached at the other end). With the power of six strong oxen, not only the thick, stiff sod, but also the roots and brush with it, could be turned over and made ready for cultivation. Ten years later, most of the prairies had been so broken, but on the rougher ground, especially the stony hills left by the glaciers, the oaks were left to grow into the forests which I know as a boy, but which have pretty much disappeared by now.

The land abounded in game, especially game birds, such as quail, prairie chickens and partridges. Will, the oldest boy, made traps out of boxes with gates on each side which would swing inward but not outward. Then he would strew a handful of wheat at a little distance around the box, with some in a narrow lure leading to each gate and a handful inside the box. Quail and prairie chickens up to the mating season run in coveys, fifteen to twenty-odd to a covey. So, when a bird found the grain and followed the lure to the trap, he was followed by the entire covey.

As a small boy, I remember seeing in Grandfather’s tool shed, a gate to a quail trap. It consisted of a round bar into which were mortised the ends of light, slender fingers, set about an inch apart. The space was wide enough to permit a bird to put his head through. As he pushed toward the grain inside, he opened the

gate. After he got inside, the gate swung shut and the bird and all his mates who got inside were caught. A sliding door on the top of the box, permitted a boy to reach in and catch the birds by the leg, pull them out and put them is his bag. I have heard Father tell that in the fall of the year, Uncle Will would sometimes find as many as thirty quail in his trap and at other times, prairie chickens so completely filled the trap-they were larger birds - that some of the covey would be seen walking around the trap, scolding because they could not get in with the others.

The agreement with Frances Draper, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, provided for “immediate possession of the dwelling house" but that, evidently, was understood to mean immediately after the remaining 300 sovereigns were paid. At any rate, before the Baker family left the Peardon home, John Baker set out one morning at sunrise to walk (there were as yet no railways in Wisconsin) to Milwaukee to pay for his farm. Why did he not pay Draper, only a few miles away? Because Draper owed so much on his land holdings that his creditor insisted on payments direct rather than risk more money in Draper's hands. Milwaukee was 37 or 38 miles distant, but John Baker was used to long walks in England. He was built for walking, six feet tall, long-legged, narrow shoulders, with light bones - he never weighed as much as 160 lbs., I've heard him say he carried a minimum load of flesh. So, he planned to walk there one day, stay over night and walk back the next day. But that plan got changed.

In those days it was common practice to do business in the public houses, the taverns. Milwaukee was a town of only two or three thousand population and followed the custom. So, when Grandfather unbuckled the money belt which he wore around his waist under his shirt and counted out the 309 gold pieces, every one present knew about it. And when the receiver blurted "goddam your kings, but your sovereigns are mighty welcome" the laugh which followed this witticism was general. Nor could it be hidden that an additional 30 sovereigns remained in the money belt, equivalent to $250.00.

At this juncture, “a black looking chap" as Grandfather described him to me, invited him to come to the bar and have a drink. If you read carefully the diary items at the beginning of this chapter, you will have observed that John Baker was aware of many "Yankee tricks" by which to get the better of a bargain. So, he

immediately thought of "knock-out drops" which might be in his drink as a means of getting at the 50 sovereigns left over in his money belt. He could not refuse to drink, for in pioneer times it was considered an insult to refuse proffered hospitality in this form. Insults led to fights and a fight might be just as fatal to the 50 sovereigns as "knock-out drops".

So, John excused himself by alleging that an insistent call of nature required him to step into the stable-yard for a moment. As soon as he was outside the door, he noticed that the cleanings from the stable had been thrown into one corner of the yard where the accumulation nearly reached the top of the stockade – that is, the posts which had been set in the ground close together so as to make a tight, strong fence, as a defense against Indian attacks. Without hesitation he run up on to this manure pile and dropped himself the eight or ten feet to the ground outside. Then he ran as fast as he could for the outskirt of town so as to get into concealment in case any pursuit was attempted.

When he reached the shelter of surrounding woods he paused to catch his breath, It was little more than three o'clock In the afternoon, Milwaukee was a dangerous city, he might as wall continue homeward, leaving to chance where he might take shelter when night fall. He reached Prairieville (Waukesha) by sundown - these were the long days of the year - there would be a long twilight. He was only eighteen or twenty miles from the Peardons, if he kept on going he would reach "home" by midnight. So he paused not – not even to get something to eat, although he had taken no food since breakfast, before sunrise.

But along the woody trail, dark came rather sooner than on Melendy's Prairie. With dark came a strange sound. He had never heard the like of it before. He had heard tales of wolves, but no one had ever imitated their call. Perhaps this was a pack of wolves! So he cut a stout stick before proceeding further. Walking rapidly and on tip-toes, he came round a bend in the road and suddenly encountered little spokes of light – the lights of their eyes? It must be wolves! And without a second thought he sprang up the trunk of the nearest tree and climbed to a comfortable limb. With a little looking around, he found such an arrangement of limbs that he could rest his back against the trunk and relax without danger of

falling out of the tree. He had walked between fifty and sixty miles, he was tired, he was weak with hunger; the rest was so-o comforting. He fell asleep.

He was awakened by the tweet of a small bird and, looking up he observed the gray twilight which precedes dawn. He was cold and stiff from his unusual exertion, the cold and his position in the tree. He had to move or get cramps. He could see no more “lights”, the wolves had ceased howling. So, with some misgiving he slid down the trunk of the tree, found his cudgel which had slipped from his hand relaxed in sleep, and carefully resumed his journey. In two or three hours, he reached the Peardons just as the sun was rising.

But what about the wolves? That afforded many a laugh in which Grandfather joined. Between Waukesha and Melendy's Prairie are many small lakes, margined by marshes in which frogs abound. These pipe an infernal racket during the early summer months, and frogs were what he heard. Close to these marshes “lightning" bugs are equally numerous and these provided the “lights in their eyes" which precipitated him into the tree.

Something of the manner of man John Baker was can be gathered from the incidents of these twenty-four hours. Within that period he had walked some 75 or 76 miles. He had roosted in a tree about seven hours, at a season when nights were cool, and took no damage. He had done all this without food. Possibly his imagination was unduly active concerning the offer of a drink, but possibly his was a reasonable prudence. The frontier community contained many rough characters and the gold pieces were enough to pay the mortgage on many a farm of those days. And many would have considered it only a good joke on the “Johnny Bull” if he had been doped and “rolled".

On what date the Bakers moved from the Peardon's to the "Dwelling house on the Buck lot", is not revealed by the diary, any more than the name of the ship by which they sailed from Plymouth to Quebec. But move they did and then began the beginnings of neighborhood life. Grace Baker had included in their baggage several pieces of cloth, scarves, etc. that were more ornamental than useful in the crude detail of keeping out the cold. As the beauty starved wives of the earlier pioneers made their welcoming calls and caught sight of such articles, they offered

native foods, fruits, etc. in exchange. Especially did they envy certain small pieces of decorated chinaware. Her dinner-set was of Canton pattern, which nearly a hundred years later I encountered again in Peking. It was not made in China, but was made in England for the China trade.

The John Chapman who witnessed the payment of one sovereign to Francis Draper to "bind the bargain" was another Englishman who lived about half a mile south of the Buck dwelling. They were early callers and while his mother was showing Mrs. Chapman some of her choice pieces, "little Bill" exhibited the odd-shaped whiskey bottle he had picked up in the woods at one of the steamboat stops, as related in Chapter V. Mrs. Chapman took a fancy to it, or pretended to, and asked Uncle Bill to give it to her. Uncle Bill had no idea of parting with his treasure, and started to back out of the room with the bottle behind his back. To Grandmother Baker this seemed a create breach of manners, so she ordered him to hand over the bottle. This threatened to develop into a domestic issue, but tactful Mrs. Chapman offered to give him in return a hen. She pictured the eating pleasure to be had from the daily egg and how she would remember “Bill” every time she looked at the bottles. Finally, the treasure was handed over and next day a hen was delivered to the Bakers. A coop was fashioned from a hollow log with stakes driven in front of the opening. And sure enough, the hen laid an egg. But did Bill get to eat it? Perhaps that one; but his mother had other ideas. At least she saved a dozen and when the little hen got broody, she was set on these eggs. In due course she brought off eleven “biddies”, and that was the beginning of the Baker poultry yard.

The building or a herd was not so painless as that of the flock of chickens - according to the story handed down by William Bone Baker. The need of a cow was fairly obvious and so in due course, John approached a neighbor, Gordon Cox, who possessed a sizeable herd. Cox admitted that he might spare an animal and asked which one John fancied. One was indicated and Cox was asked the price. He then stated that he was not anxious to sell and asked how much Baker was willing to pay. Grandfather, knowing that a cow would sell for £5.0.0 in England offered $15.00. Cox demurred gently, suggesting a less valuable cow, but finally gave in “to accommodate a neighbor”. Shortly afterward he encountered neighbor

Chapman and related in high glee how he would have been glad to sell the cow for $7.00, but since “that fool Johnny Bull” had offered him $15.00 he had made the unusual bargain.

All might still have gone well if Chapman had not twitted grandfather on his having lost all his good sense while he was sea-sick and throwing up on shipboard. And even this might have provoked no violence if he had not repeated it at a gathering where both Cox and grandfather were present. Having partaken of the supply of whiskey which was being passed around (It sold for as little as 15¢ a gallon in those days) grandfather, who was always quick tempered, accused Cox of sharp practice unseemly with a neighbor. But Cox argued "You offered $15.00; why shouldn't I take it?? With that grandfather made an obscene observation of the ancestry of an animal who would take that sort of advantage over a trusting neighbor. Cox, who rarely drank and was cold sober, then took an aggressive stance and said "In Canada where I come from, we don't take that kind of talk". But grandfather, quite out of his senses, retorted "You have taken it. What are you going to do about it?" adding a further obscenity. Cox very coldly rejoined "Some day, Baker, you're going to be very sorry for that". A few days later, grandfather was sick with chills and fever and sitting out in the yard on a log. Cox was grubbing out stumps across the road and seeing grandfather, picked up an oak root, sneaked up from behind and knocked him cold with a blow on the head. A neighbor, one of the Bottrells, coming up the road, witnessed the whole proceeding. Rushing to the rescue, he brought grandfather back to consciousness by dashing gold water in his face and explained what had happened. Seeing the club by which he had been undone, Grandfather forgot all about being sick, picked up the club and started after Cox who had taken to his heals. At running Cox was no match for the long-legged Englishman, but he was good at dodging the blows rather blindly aimed at him. This closing in gave Bottrell a chance to intervene and finally persuade the combatants to go back to their respective homes, grandfather still yelling at Cox, “Ah'll kill ‘ee; ah'l kill ‘ee.”

Next day Cox reflected that he had laid himself open to a suit for substantial damages. So, he went to Milwaukee to consult a lawyer who advised him to bring action against Baker for his threat to kill. When the papers were served on

Grandfather, he also consulted a lawyer, who quickly discerned his opponent's tactics and advised grandfather to take steps preliminary to a suit for damages against Cox, but to press it only if Cox actually began action or would not keep the peace. There are never any secrets on such matters in rural neighborhoods, Bottrell got in his work as a mediator again, and in due course the neighbors agreed not to "fatten the lawyers" and become, if not friends, at least peaceful citizens.

The hen-coop previously described was no sore primitive then shelters for other "live-stook". I do not remember ever hearing grandfather tell about his horse stable, cow shed or sheep fold, or even when the need for these began, except in the ease of horses. Out of the fifty sovereigns remaining after he had paid for his farm, he bought a team of horses, a wagon and a plough. Why he bought horses while the custom was in favor of oxen, I do not know and he never explained in my hearing. Even for driving long distances, oxen were better adapted to the rough roads. Their slower movement and more patient temperament made much less strain on the vehicle when a wheel slipped into a chuckhole, perchance to mire there. But buy horses he did and he needed a stable for them against the rains in summer and the cold in winter. And in time, he needed similar shelter for oxen, cows and sheep. Pigs could sleep in the strawpiles, as did a good many of the calves and yearlings.

Horse stables and cow sheds of pioneer times were identical in construction. I never saw grandfather's but as a very small boy, I saw some on our own farm. First, four young burr oak trees eight or ten inches in diameter were selected, and cut so as to provide posts about ten feet long, with a substantial crotch at one end. These became the comer posts, being sunk in the ground about three feet, with the crotches uppermost. Then strong poles, about six inches in diameter were laid from one post to another, resting in the crotch of the post. Smaller poles were next laid across these first poles, say two feet apart; and on top of this framework, straw was heaped, several feet deep, to shed the rain. The sides and ends of the shed were made of two rows of rails with straw stuffed in between. Every year fresh straw had to be piled on the roof and pushed in the sidings as the old straw rotted or packed down. But a stable of this sort kept out the wind and the rain, if well made, and was warm. It was dark inside unless a hole was made for a window, but the

hole let in the wind and the cold. So, most farmers let the sheds be dark, leaving the door open for purposes of light when they had to work inside. Some farmers built substantial log buildings, like their houses, for their animals. But it was not long before sawmills and better transportation made it possible to sell wheat for money and with the cash, buy lumber out of which farm yard buildings like those of the present day were constructed.

The cattle and horses were watered at the creek about a quarter mile from the house. They could be depended on to take care of themselves in this respect. Let out of the shed, they knew where to go for drink and where to return for feed and shelter. But human needs were not so simply supplied. Barrels at the corners of the cabin, to which eave-boards led from the roof, during seasons of frequent rains, could catch enough water for washing of clothes, utensils, etc. For drinking purposes, water was carried from a spring not far from the creek where the cattle drank - about a quarter-mile from the house. While this was a considerable chore, the water was so cool and sweet-tasting as to make the trip rather rewarding.

The country was so new that no fences divided one farm from another nor many cultivated fields from the unploughed prairies or the uncut forests. Garden plots were fenced in by the zig-zag rail fences that you all know. But children were plentiful and these either watched the fields to keep off wandering cattle or watched the grazing cattle to keep them off growing crops. The latter soon became the accepted practice. At any rate, according to my father's account, by the time he was seven years old, his summer job was to “run with the cattle", By this time, John Baker had acquired something of a herd, (See Appendix III), including two or three milk cows. These, it was the task of his daughter Mary Jane to milk. Milking was woman's work in England. John Baker never milked a cow in his life, and when Mary Jane married and left home, his sons had to take over that task.

This "running with the cows" over the vast unfenced, varied areas of marsh, hills and wood always appeared to me as a romantic occupation. But unless the herd joined that of some other friendly boy, time could hang heavily on a boy's hands and the summer day be very long. Not all boys are friendly; when herds are joined, some times bulls fought, scaring the small boy not only by the passion of the struggle but with the thought that he might be held responsible if a bull were

killed. And so, much of the time he chose solitude except for a beloved dog. “old Smart”. And “old Smart” was smart. He'd stay with the boy until the lunch was shared and then scamper home to catch another seal of the scraps from the mid-day dinner table. Then, during the long afternoon, there was nothing for the boy to do but to learn the ways of the small animals, which are not shy at all if one remains motionless; to imitate the calls of birds and rind their nests; to hunt flint arrowheads where recent rains bad laid bare the earth. At these pastimes, the boy became proficient. In his mature years, be would generally come back with an arrowhead after a trip over the fields to observe the state of the “fall seeding”. He would often lead me to the nest of a killdeer or a nighthawk. One winter night while we were feeding the sheep, a tiny owl perched on a tall post (that had once been the corner post of a straw-covered horse-stable) and began to trill his call. I watched this former "cow-boy” carefully approach this post, answering the call so faithfully that the little owl was busy trying to locate his mate, or rival, when its toes were firmly pinned down by the loved finger of my father.

And it is quite possible that some of these quests became more absorbing then the wanderings of the cattle. It is not unlikely that at times the cattle found growing wheat or corn much more succulent than the June grass or wild hay upon which they were expected to feed. If so, it was natural that neighbors objected. And pioneers were frequently rather crude in their expression of objections. This may explain certain items found in the diary, or notebook, in which John Baker made only infrequent entries after the arrival in America. Under 1855 this series of entries occurs: -

“June 10. Geo. Cox shot at Julius and Frances Baker in their own lot.”

“June 11. Charles Cox set his dog on my sheep when passing the road.”

“June 14. Charles Cox set his dog on my cattle and stop them in the road before John."

“June 20. John Chapman set his dog on my cattle while passing road and turned them back before Francis Baker".

From the stories grandfather told me, I got the impression that numbers of the “Yankees” sort of “picked on” the "Johnny Bull" as a sort of sport. He was

sensitive and his temper was easily aroused. Yet, his anger rarely resulted in blows. However, he did not entirely avoid physical contacts. One evening, driving home from the Eagleville mill, he came upon a neighbor being held down by one husky youth while another kicked him in the crotch. Grandfather, leaped off his wagon, and “wopped their heads together”, as he expressed it, whereupon one of them objected "Didn't I work for your?” “An' dint I pay thuh?" Grandfather replied. The downed man, one Ward, after whom our Ward school was named, got up and made his way off without further molestation from the youths whose heads had been knocked together. Their explanation was that Ward had made objectional remarks about them in connection with some girl.

At another time, grandfather was driving over that hilly road two miles east of our old home (he had a piece of marsh adjoining that road) when he heard screams from the yard of a certain Irish immigrant family. He whipped up his horses and as he came closer he saw the husband abusing his wife around the yard with an upraised axe. Again he jumped off the load, ran into the yard and knocked the man down with a blow of his fist. Then he knelt on the prostrate figure to wrest the are away. But at that moment he received a sharp crack on the hand from a heavy stick and the woman yelled at him, "Can't me and the ol’ man be havin’ a decent quarrel widdout you stickin' yer long English nose into it?” "Never interfere between man an' wife", was his caution to me as he told the tale.

Another episode which he used to relate with glee was a threshing scene on his own farm. He was carrying away the grain in bags. Apparently help was plentiful, for there was idle time between one full bag and another, One of the lively young men thought to improve the moment by knocking off grandfather's hat, remarking that it was a "Yankee sport" which he would teach grandfather. “Then I'll tache thee a little Cornish play". With that "h'I kicked un in the shins". “’Ee then made a great kick at my shins, but h'I slipped me leg to one side, caught 'is voot by t'other leg, pushed un in the chest an' 'ee vell h'over, splang.” That, of course, was the authentic form of Cornish wrestling, if wrestling it may be called. I've heard him tell of contests in which the shoes of the contestants “ran over wi' blood".

The money crop of this era vas wheat, - wheat which eventually was shipped to England where it was sold to the mills at prices with which English farmers could not compete. It was sowed by hand as in England, but it was not reaped by a reap-hook as in England. In America, a cradle was used, by which a man could cut perhaps ten times as much as he could by reap-hook. This faster cutting and the yields from virgin soils put the American farmer in a position to sell much cheaper than the English farmer in spite of the cost of the haul from America to England.

Perhaps you do not know what a cradle is? It is much like a scythe, but in addition to the cutting blade, some three or four wooden fingers, curved like the scythe blade, and parallel to the blade are fastened at intervals of about seven inches above the blade. The skilled cradler at the end of each stroke gives the cradle a tip which delivers the out grain in an even row, “swath” is the term used, so that the binders following with two strokes of a wooden rake, would gather the out grain into an even bunch for binding. Binding was done by seizing a handful of the grain just below the heads, This was done with the left hand; the right hand then grasped half of the straws and twisted them around the other half to make a band; then shoved the band under the bundle, pulled the stubble ends toward and past each other, crossed then, gave a half turn to each and shoved them under the band, so that the pressure of the bound straw would hold the band tight. Almost anybody can bind. In England it was rather considered women's work. But cradling was something different. that took a man – a strong man. The shorter his back and the longer his arms, the wider the reach he could cut and the longer he could keep at the work. It required strength as well as skil1. John Baker did not know how to cradle. So, he hired men who did --- An entry dated April 15, 1851 notes that “Charles Cox is hired for six months at 12 dollars a month for 26 days provided he can cradle, stack good and do other work. He is to make up lost time on account of sickness".

At that, farm hands had their pride, for the record later shows that he was "Absent one day to have his hair cut”.

How many acres were sowed to wheat, how they threshed it after it was cut and stacked, are indicated by a letter written in 1851 (Appendix III). Neither the diary nor memory of casual tales give any other evidence things started well, but

for several seasons afterward America was disappointing. A mildew or blight settled on the ripening crop and damaged it no little. So serious was this disease that grandfather remarked several times he would have returned to England if he had been possessed of the means for doing so and anything in England to which he might go back. He had no alternative; he had to stay. I suspect that many a hardy pioneer was like him and became hardy because that was the only way to survive. Having survived, he was at hand when favorable circumstances made comfort possible.

What wheat was threshed and not milled for home use, had to be hauled to Milwaukee for sale. Once the roads were broken through, a yoke of oxen could haul a big load on a sleigh. Fully two days were required for this forty mile haul -- two days there and two days back. With a day in Milwaukee in which to do the trading, the minimum required for a round trip was five days -- six if any bad luck were encountered. The lead teams from Galena could be depended upon to break out the road after a fresh fall of snow. And the inns which sprang up every few miles along this road furnished accommodations for the night and meals during the day. They housed a rough clientele. Whiskey was cheap and apparently as potent as it is now. It was not taxed as it is today, as the diary contains an item of "a quart of whiskey at 9¢"[1]. That was in 1852. Whether the cheapness, the potency or experience on some trip was the cause, on a page dated 1853 in very faded pencil is to be found "I John Baker by grace of God do intend to totally abstain from all intoxicating drink and from Sabath breaking and from swareing".

What the price of wheat was in the first years of American farming, does not appear, but in 1855, May 11, there is the record, load by load of deliveries of wheat bought by a Mr. Stuart, 400 bushels at $1.25 a bushel. By June 20, the price was $1.50 a bushel. Apparently, as in all countries at a low economic level, prices were high somewhat before harvest and very low just after harvest. It is to be inferred, too, from the Stuart entry that John Baker was not forced to sell immediately after harvest and held his wheat until the better price season. Perhaps he did not hold for

[1] Compare with $4.00 in 1951

the top prices, rued it enough to make a record of the higher prices, but was sufficiently conservative to sell when be considered the price "good".

In spite of the hard work of every day, there was some social diversion. Grandfather's love for music and his command of the violin led to frequent get-togethers with other musicians. Sundays were often spent in neighborhood gatherings of the sort. A group might meet at a blacksmith shop and while their horses were being shod would make up a male quartette. But the religious attitudes were not neglected. Before there were any churches, groups would meet at neighbors' cabins and discuss their beliefs, quote Scripture, and argue theological points. Atheism and agnosticism were not in good repute in those times. The belief in hell-fire and damnation was very general. But this did not prevent some very unorthodox views from being presented in these meetings.

Grandfather used to quote one Guerdson Cox to the effect that "Many love God because they're afraid of the devil".

This group who met around the Baker neighborhood called themselves the "Association of free-thinkers". They meant by this nothing more than that each person was free to do his own thinking. Possibly the agnostics and atheists were the most out-spoken, and so in time these became known as "Free Thinkers". At any rate, the religiously inclined were soon corralled into denominational churches. Those hardy missionaries, the circuit riders, at more or less regular intervals, visited the Baker neighborhood and in 1851 a Bible Christian congregation at Little Prairie was organized. In course of time, this materialized into a Methodist Episcopal Church, which in June, 1951 celebrated its Centennial. When the religiously inclined had joined churches, this left the term "Free Thinkers" in the possession of the agnostics and atheists. This explanation may not be historically complete or absolutely accurate, but it will serve.