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In Their Own Words

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Eagle, The Prairie on Which I Live by Frederic A. Sprague

Editor's Note: Frederic A. Sprague was one of Eagle's early settlers, arriving here in 1842. Born in 1795, he was a veteran of The War of 1812 and was one of the most successful physicians in Wisconsin at that time. He was elected to the State Senate for Waukesha County in 1848.

Originally from Massachusetts, Sprague's migration west was typical of the Yankees, who were lured west by land prices and the lack of capital in the East. He and his family spent several years in Ohio, moving on when their house burned down and they found themselves \$10,000 in debt, a considerable sum now, let alone in 1841.

Sprague and his family moved on to Wisconsin. The following is an excerpt of his account of the experience written in a letter to an older brother in Massachusetts. It presents a fascinating glimpse of Eagle in the early 1840s.

Eagle, Milwaukee County
Wisconsin Territory
Dec. 4, 1842

Dear Brother:

About the first of May, I and my oldest son, with a first-rate pair of horses and buggy, started for the far West to find a better home. We traveled about 1,500 miles by land and after exploring a large tract of country, finally settled on Eagle prairie. I bought 200 acres for five dollars per acre. I went to work and broke up and put 30 acres into wheat by the first of Sept which looks well.

I have built me a good frame house 18 x 24, one- and one-half stories high, four rooms on the floor, and finished it off inside and out, have dug and stoned me a well, 20 feet deep and ploughed 30 acres for spring crops and are now drawing 10,000 rails to finish fencing my farm – all of this besides teaming for other people to the amount of about fifty dollars has been done by me and my boys since the 11th day of July.

I have not paid for my farm yet but if I receive my money due me in Ohio I shall pay for my farm and put 100 acres into wheat next year and 60 acres into other crops. My farm is well watered and has about 160 acres that there is not a bush or stump nor stone on, level and smooth and every foot is as rich as the richest garden there is in Massachusetts. It is very healthy here. There has not been a case of fever of any kind on this prairie since its first settlement. There has been no sickness here since I came here and the inhabitants indeed seem to know nothing about sickness.

The prairie on which I live is a complete flower garden every week and almost every day from the first of March to the first of October. There is a new kind of flower coming forth; sometimes the prairie is a beautiful blue, sometimes pink, sometime yellow and sometimes white with flowers almost all of which are new to me. There is a plenty of government land to be sold here for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, but will all soon be in secured hands. Gold and silver are as plenty here as I ever saw bank bills in Ohio.

I think you would do well to come here. I have to go six miles to get my shoes mended. Cowhide boots are 4 dollars a pair. For 800 dollars you can get you a farm a mile square, the best land you ever saw which you have nothing to do but fence and plough and sow. The first crop will pay for ploughing and fencing and for the land and all expenses. I am about 30 miles southwest from Milwaukee. Good land can be bought now within 5 miles of here at government prices, but good chances will soon be over. If you come you had better come soon. Take the railroad to Buffalo and from Buffalo you will come here by steam in 3 or 4 days.

We have plenty of fish within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. I and one of my boys caught 60 pounds in less than two hours, weighing from five to eleven pounds apiece. Our boys have killed a plenty of deer, partridges, prairie hens, wild geese, wild ducks and sand hill cranes – a kind of bird from five to six feet high, and caught 12 of the largest coons I ever saw, some of them weighing about 30 pounds.

I have a great deal more to write but have only room to say that I still remain your affectionate brother.

Frederic A. Sprague