

The Emigrant's Handbook and Guide to Wisconsin, 1851



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In 1851 Milwaukee resident Samuel Freeman published "The Emigrant's Handbook and Guide to Wisconsin," one of many immigrant guidebooks published to lure Europeans to the state. Many of these publications were written in foreign languages to attract specific nationalities, including Danes, Norwegians, and Germans. In the Emigrant's Handbook, Freeman hoped to attract well-to-do English-speaking immigrants.

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General Instructions

Having now given as clear an outline of the subject as the limits of this work will permit, and I trust fulfilled the promise made at the outset, that the emigrant should be supplied at a cheap rate, with information valuable both for present and future application, I shall draw to a conclusion by offering a few general observations to the emigrant, to guide him to this western country, and be useful to him in time to come.

New York being the principal landing place, and a large city, the emigrant is apt to be surrounded on all sides if he does not keep a sharp look out, by a set of men who, under pretence of being his friend or his countryman, allure him among strangers, with all the snares and temptations that such a large city affords, which are calculated, in a very short time, to use up all his means before he is aware of it. I would guard him to avoid these men and shun them as he would a serpent, for their only object is to get his money and introduce him to places of resort where gaming and drinking are carried on to an endless extent; and in the end calculated to bring ruin upon himself and his family. One of the many temptations that beset the emigrant, is the numerous gambling houses there are in New York; and one of the most tempting forms of gambling is found at some of the low saloons, where raffles are constantly going on, to a great extent, either for watches, jewelry, guns, pistols, or other bogus articles; and any quantity of liquor indulged in during the intervals of the game. . . .

The emigrant's chance employment and good wages is much increased by removing from seaboard towns.--New York being the principal landing place, and from the influx of strangers continually pouring in there, it is impossible for merchants, traders and others, to give employment to one-tenth that arrive here.

Under these circumstances, I strongly advise the emigrant, both mechanic and laborer, after they have spent a day or two inspecting the city, to lose no time in quitting that place whilst they have the means of doing so to assist themselves. The facilities for traveling in the United States are cheap and good. Steamboats, railroad conveyances and coaches, start daily for all parts. This you will find to be the most profitable way of laying the foundation of your future happiness. Lose no time, then, in working your way out of New York and directing your steps westward, where labor is plentiful and sure to meet with its reward. . . .

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The Emigrant, on landing at any Port on Lake Michigan, if he has a family, had better engage a lodging for them immediately, or go into some cheap Boarding House.

The Emigrant's next object will be, if he intends to farm, or to labor on a farm, to get into the country as soon as he can, for he will find every thing there much cheaper, and have a better opportunity of becoming acquainted with the quality and the local advantages of the land. In fact he had better hire a small farm for a season than make too hasty a purchase. By so doing he will be better able to know the quality and eligibility of land. The smallest quantity of land sold by the Government is forty acres. This can be purchased in Wisconsin for five shillings sterling per acre. Those who have the means will find it to their advantage to purchase improved farms: they can be purchased generally for less than the improvements cost. There are two Emigration Offices in this City. Messrs. Gregory and Kickson's Office is situated in Wisconsin Street over the Post Office. Emigrants will be able at this office to select out from their Maps, Farms wild and improved in every part of the state. They are also Emigration Agents for Houses in New York City, and remit money to all parts of Ireland. . . .

I must also here caution Emigrants, above all things, to make no purchase but what they can pay for; never run in debt with the calculation of paying the purchase money by the produce of the farm. This is undoubtedly a rock upon which many are wrecked. Many calculations are made of the expense of clearing and the cultivation of farms, with the amount and price of the produce from that cultivation, showing by the difference that it was a very profitable investment. All this looks very nice on paper, but rest assured many have found it to their sorrow, exceedingly wrong in practice. I would therefore urge to all Emigrants coming to Wisconsin to buy no more land than you can comfortably pay for, and after all leave a sufficiency to purchase a few of the necessaries of life. . . .

Do not be downcast and disheartened after you have got here. Most of you, probably, have once been in moderate circumstances in the Old Country. You have left, probably, father, mother, brother and sister; perhaps some of you have left your wives and families behind you. You have come in search of a home in the "Far West." The industrial resources of your country refuse any longer to sustain you--and here you are come to seek the means of sustaining yourself and families--then my fellow countrymen, instead of murmuring and being disheartened, rather be thankful that God in his Providence has left an unmistakable mark on the map of the World, that guides the homeless and the destitute to a place of refuge. Therefore, I would advise, and I do it strongly, that you forbear to speak ill either of the manners or the country which you have sought refuge in. I have been a keen observer since I have been in this Western Country, and in instances without number, I have been disgusted with the Old Country people when they get here--the way they speak of America or Americans--before they know or have any means of knowing either the country or the natives. Just probably because some have not found every thing to their own minds as they had it at home, or disappointment comes upon them from a false representation made to them before they started across the Atlantic; they commence raving against "Yankees" and wish themselves back again, while if they would sober down their senses, and on calm reflection they would discern the folly of the course they are pursuing.

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But you, fellow-countrymen, who I am addressing, and who are perusing these pages, I hope for better things.--Always bear in mind "a still tongue maketh a wise head," and instead of desponding, be thankful that your lot is cast in such pleasant places, and on your arrival in Wisconsin, turn your attention to her resources, her fertile prairies and beautiful openings. . . . This is the Country you are invited to, fellow-countrymen; Americans are not a homogeneous race. Within the United States dwell representatives from every nation of Europe, and the population of Wisconsin has a large proportion of foreign born citizens. They have brought with them their own respective languages--they are marked with the distinctive characteristics of the various States whence they came--they are unlike each other in their habits, and they differ much in sentiment. They have come to cast in their lot with a strange people--to live with them and be of them, and what does the American Government say to you? pay attention whilst I tell you:--We welcome you, for our land is broad, and we need your numbers and your aid to occupy it; we welcome you, for we know that, attracted by the fame of our country's freedom, many of you have come from oppression at home; and being free ourselves, we gladly hail you freemen and citizens. Then, instead of murmuring and being downcast when you get here, cheer up and join her glorious band. Wisconsin is one of the great company of free communities, bound together for the extension and perpetuation of civil and religious liberty, and placed in the van of all the nations of the earth, to lead the march of human progress.

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We, my fellow-countrymen, in this State, are indeed a favored people--none more so--and it becomes us, in a spirit of gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy, well to reflect upon, and faithfully perform the duties Heaven has allotted us--to improve to every possible extent the trust which has been confided to our care. Nations as well as individuals have missions to fulfill; and if, through design, or through heedlessness, they fail to pursue them, they may look for the righteous indignation of the Ruler above, who will hold them to a stern and fearful accountability--well remembering that whatever we may do here in Wisconsin for her glory and good, will help to swell, also, the happiness and glory of the whole Union; while the errors we may commit, or the evils we may let loose among ourselves, will be mainly ours in all the injuries or disgraces they may occasion. Finally, fellow-countrymen, let me tell you America is a country overflowing with prosperity and happiness--one which knows not the meaning of internal tumult--one which most of her citizens, with scarcely an exception, can command the necessaries of life; meat, drink, clothing and shelter from the elements in abundance--where her Members of the Congress are elected by universal suffrage--where neither game laws nor tithes exist--and where the Chief Magistrate lives with dignity in an income of £5000 per annum.

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