

January 20, 1915.

COMMUNICATION OF INTEREST

By THOS. CLITHERO.

I have read with approval a recent statement of The Democrat correcting the modern error of calling Governor's Bend a government bend but am disposed to offer a different version of the origin of the name.

Governor's Bend was so named some twelve years before the lock was built or in 1851, having been christened by the crew of the dredge which dug the canal from Twigg's Ferry, or Port Hope, to the bend in question and thence to Ft. Winnebago. The facts herewith presented were certified to me in writing by the late W. W. Cooper, who was a member of the crew referred to. The governor alluded to was Hon. Nelson Dewey, the first governor of the state of Wisconsin, who visited the dredge in an official capacity while lying below the bend. The dredge had cut a straight course from Twigg's Ferry to the curve lowering the channel some three feet and the question arose whether to continue the course straight through the projecting point or to worm the dredge around the abrupt angle. Governor Dewey, who was somewhat eccentric, objected to plowing through the peninsula as a species of sacrilege, claiming that the bend was one of "God's Dams," so to speak, for retarding the flow of water and being the chief officer of the state under whose authority the canal was dug, there was nothing left for the crew but to grin and bear it. Of course, the governor did not tarry to see the task accomplished, which instead of three days required two weeks of tedious efforts, but the boat men had their sweet revenge. They dubbed the angle, Governor's Bend, and in honor of his excellency's pious obstinacy and singular phraseology, indulged in more profanity than usual. The lock was built during the draft riots of the civil war, the writer being one of the workmen. At that time Horatio Seymour was governor of the state of New

York and having more than his hands full in New York City, was hardly likely to have visited Governor's Bend; certainly not without the writer's knowledge.

He did make an historical visit to this locality in 1848, with a distinguished company of capitalists, none of whom were governors. These men were seeking not a place to build locks but for eligible town sites, one of which was selected at Twigg's Ferry. The general cook and roustabout of the historic journey was Billy Ransom, an old acquaintance of early Portage, who overheard the decision to build a river metropolis at Port Hope and notified his friend, the late Jonathan Whitney, who instantly took advantage of it.

This journey was made in row boats and canoes, and not in a steamer, as suggested. The first steamer to ascend Fox river to Ft. Winnebago was the Johnny Mitchell of Oshkosh, which tied up at the FZ bridge amid the ringing of bells and firing of guns and anvils, in the autumn of 1851. The dredge had already arrived and participated in the celebration. This coincidence in time was remembered by old boatmen by a laughable circumstance in which both dredge and steamer participated. One night the crew of the steamer went out for a lark and stole and secreted in the vessel the great wooden eagle carved by some ingenious soldier of the garrison which spread its protecting wings over the gateway of the deserted fortress. On the following night the crew of the dredge planned a counter lark and restole the king of birds from the original thieves and replaced it upon the gate.

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