

It took my great-great-grandfather two tries to make it in America.

Born in Cortachy, Scotland in 1820, James Lowe and his family emigrated to Canada in 1836.

They settled on land near LaChute, Canada, next to the family of the beautiful Wilhelmina Schlaberg, a fellow native of Scotland, whom he would eventually marry in 1845.

Eleven children and 20 years later, not being content with his life in Canada, James Lowe would embark on a journey to America.

A journey that would take him 6,000 miles away from his family in Canada, to find a new life for them and new possibilities for a future in America. He would go to California to find land and bring his family after he had established himself there.

Here is the story of the unsuccessful attempt my great-great-grandfather made exactly one hundred and fifty years ago this summer.

In May of 1867, James Lowe and his son James Jr. were driven in an oxen cart to the train, which would take them to New York City, where they would board the Henry Chauncy.

Before setting sail, James wrote a letter to his wife Minnie:

"Now, My Dear Minnie, you are not to grieve and trouble yourself about our departure. I know that the Great God above will protect me and James. We are the pioneers for the rest of the Family."

They sailed southward along the Atlantic coast to Panama where they crossed by railroad, then boarded the steamship Constitution to sail up the Pacific coast to San Francisco, where they arrived, 22 days after leaving New York.

Sick from the sea and weakened by the journey, it took a while for James Sr. to feel well enough to work. After a time they found work threshing on a farm.

In September, they got hired at a sawmill, 300 miles from where they first landed. The work proved difficult for James, who by now was 47 years old.

In October, James Jr. became ill and returned to San Francisco to convalesce while James Sr. stayed on at the mill near Fort Ross.

Over the winter, they decided to go back to Canada.

On February 15, 1868, they set sail on the steamship Dakota to begin the long journey back to Canada. James Sr. got home just in time to see his father, David Lowe, before he died.

One week later, perhaps being embarrassed by not being successful in making a new life in California for his family, James packed up the entire family and left for Iowa, where his wife's brother had homesteaded.

This second attempt was successful for James. He got his citizenship, and eventually homesteaded in Minnesota. His children grew up, married and had their children of their own.

His eldest son, James Jr., married Anna Sheerin, in 1880 in Avoca, Minnesota. And from this union came, George Lowe, my grandfather.

So though he failed the first time, James Lowe Sr. finally established a home in America for him and his family. Though he believed he had failed in making a home in California, this was a good thing....for me at least... because in the end, if

they had stayed in California, I wouldn't be here today.

[Correction: In February 1868, from San Francisco, James Lowe and his son sailed on the steamship America to Panama, then boarded the Dakota in Panama for New York.]