

Local author publishes latest book; "We suffered much"

By **MICHAEL ROY**
Editor

There are fewer things more rewarding than making a discovery, whether it's coming up with a new idea, creating an invention, or even rediscovering lost history. Local author Cindy Wilson's latest writing endeavor involved the latter.

In her latest book, "We Suffered Much," Wilson tells the tale of Charles Wood Irish, a railroad worker and land surveyor who was responsible for creating the railroad from Tracy, Minnesota, to South Dakota's capital, Pierre, from 1879 to 1881. The book also details Irish himself and his family.

The idea for this book partially stemmed from her research for her previous book, "The Beautiful Snow."

"When I was researching for that book, I sought out the dairies about where the rail lines would go from Tracy onwards," she explained. "DeSmith, South Dakota, was one of the towns that sprung up on the railroad in the wake of Irish and his men."

Although her love for history makes it seem like she's been writing for years, it's more of a second career for her. After growing up in Bloomington, MN, Wilson spent most of her adult life in Lakeville, MN, where her initial career had been computer work, including creating websites, marketing, and communications. Even after moving to Elysian 14 years ago, she hadn't thought of a career change until her friends encouraged her to look into it.

"I had helped several friends



railroad. "In the first book, I wanted to see where the railroad was during the winter," she said. When all was said and done, I found the diaries to be so interesting."

To her, though, the most interesting was that of Charles Wood Irish.

In 2019, she officially began work on what would become "We Suffered Much." However, she had delayed work on the book to go through a knee replacement. After a full year of recovering by hiking and biking, she had a fresh and clean mind. "My enthusiasm for the book never waned," she said.

Research for "We Suffered Much" involved plenty of travel. One place she researched was the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre. She also did plenty of research at the University of Iowa in Iowa City where Charles Wood Irish's maps, diaries, and letters were.

"I made multiple trips to Iowa City, a few to Pierre, and more than a handful of trips to

"I had helped several friends develop their books, creating story arcs, developing ideas, and proofreading and editing their work," Wilson explained. "But I had never thought about creating my own book despite encouragement from teachers back in elementary school. My career was different than that."

After thinking about it, she leaped and made an intentional career switch to writing.

The first book idea, "The Beautiful Snow," came to her when it was her turn in her neighborhood book group to pick a story to read. She chose "The Long Winter," an autobiography by Laura Ingalls Wilder detailing life during the harsh winter of 1880-81.

"We had been reading some pretty heavy books, so I wanted to pick something lighthearted," she reminisced. "Well, 'The Long Winter' definitely wasn't a lighthearted book to lighten the mood."

Wilson's friends had asked her how close the actual story of that 1880-81 winter was to Laura Ingalls Wilder's tale, which had her researching the topic out of "personal curiosity." When she found out more information, her friends "in the Laura Ingalls Wilder world" encouraged her to make a book about it. Still, despite making a conscious career change to writing now, "The Beautiful Snow" was a side project while she still worked full-time.

After finishing her first book, she did more research about the

more than a handful of trips to western Minnesota and South Dakota on the ground, tracing their path, gathering camp locations, and figuring out where the routes they selected were and alternatives they contemplated and explored."

The most rewarding part of this book to Wilson was pulling out the history of this man who was "incredible and yet lost to history."

Irish's family was also special. "He had 20-something-year-old daughters, and he was not your stereotypical Victorian-era father. He encouraged them to learn science and engineering, and to exercise intellect instead of falling for the cultural norm of the time and staying home. They are every bit as interesting as he is."

Digging and exploring these facts are her favorite parts of history. "I like putting different pieces together and tying them into context," she said. "I can't explain why I enjoy it. I just really love doing it."

Wilson is continuing to research and unearth some history. She's already working on a third book about the Stockman house in Mason City, Iowa, and she's anxious to get started. She also has an additional story on the railroad she hopes to write, but is "not fleshed out."

To purchase the book "We Suffered Much," visit ItascaBooks.com and other retailers. For more information on Cindy Wilson, visit her website cindywilson-author.com.