

*The Bark Covered House* by William Nowlin  
Excerpt Two -- Mosquitoes

“We found the country was so very wet, at times, that it was impossible to go with oxen and sled, which were our only means of (carrying things).... (Then) we were **obliged** to carry all ...on our shoulders, from Dearbornville.

“We had many **annoyances** ...(like)mosquitoes, but they did us some good. We had no fences to keep our cattle (on our land), (but) the mosquitoes drove the oxen and cow up to the smoke which we kept near the house in order to keep those little pests away. The cattle soon learned...that smoke was a very powerful **repellant** of those little warriors. Many times, in ...going through the woods there would be a perfect cloud of mosquitoes around me. ...The woods were literally alive with them. ...Sometimes I would run to get away from them, then stop and look behind me and there would be a great flock for two **rods** back,...all coming toward me as fast as their wings could bring them.... All sang the same song in the same old tune. I was always glad when I got out of their company into our own little clearing.

“No one can tell the **wearisome** sleepless hours they caused us at night. I have lain listening and waiting for them to light on my ...hands, and then trying to slap them by guess in the dark, sometimes killing them, and sometimes they would fly away, to come again in a few minutes. I could hear them as they came singing back....Frequently some one of us would get up and make a **smudge** in the room to quiet them; we did it by making a little fire of small chips and dirt, or by burning some sugar on coals, but this would only keep them still for a short time.

“In cloudy weather they were very troublesome as all the first settlers know. We had them many years, until the country was cleared and the land (drained with ditches); then, with the forest, they nearly disappeared.”

**Vocabulary:** obliged = forced to; annoyances = things that bother you; repellant = substance that pushes away or keeps away certain thing; rod = distance of 16 feet; wearisome = tiring; smudge = small, smoky fire.

Questions to think about and answer:

1. What made travel difficult in Michigan some parts of the year?
2. How did William’s family carry supplies when they could not use their oxen?
3. What good did the mosquitoes do for William’s family?
4. What helped keep the mosquitoes away from the animals and people?
5. Was William able to run away from the mosquitoes?
6. Why was William able to get away from the mosquitoes in the cleared area around his family’s house?
7. What does William mean when he describes the mosquitoes as “singing?”
8. How did the “smudge” in a room keep the mosquitoes away?
9. Why do you think there were so many mosquitoes in William’s house?
10. What two things happened to make the mosquitoes nearly disappear?