

A Medical Student In Keokuk

Letters of Joshua Nichols Speed, 1858—1860¹

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There were a great many Speeds in Kentucky in the early nineteenth century, but Joshua was not a common name among them. It is therefore possible that when a son was born to William Speed and Elizabeth Nichols Speed in Danville, February 1, 1833, he was named for his father's second cousin, Joshua Fry Speed, known to history as a close friend of Abraham Lincoln.

Joshua Nichols Speed grew up in Kentucky and attended Danville's Centre College, where the four year course of study emphasized Greek, Latin, philosophy, mathematics, and the sciences. He graduated in 1853, and the following year moved with his family to Bardolph, Illinois, a village near Macomb in the west-central part of the state. During the school year 1855-1856, he taught mathematics at McDonough College in Macomb. But his chief interest, perhaps stimulated by his course in chemistry at Centre College, was medicine, and he began to study it under the direction of Dr. Jesse Sweeney in Rushville, Illinois, a market town twenty-five miles south of Macomb. Like an aspiring lawyer reading law in the office of an established attorney, Joshua served his medicine apprenticeship under Dr. Sweeney, reading the Doctor's books and helping him in the care of patients. Since he once wrote that Mrs. Sweeney was like a mother to him, and since his own parents remained in Bardolph until the end of 1859, he probably lived with the Sweeney family as well.²

¹ For her generosity in loaning me her collection of Speed-Scripps family correspondence stretching over a period of three generations and for permission to publish excerpts from it, I am indebted to Mrs. George H. Hartman, of Winnetka, Illinois.

² Data about the Speed family may be found in Thomas Speed, *Records and Memorials of the Speed Family* (Louisville, Ky., 1892). For biographical information about Joshua Nichols Speed, I have relied upon *Combined History of Schuyler and Brown Counties, Illinois* (Philadelphia, 1882), and evidence in the Speed-Scripps Collection.

Among Joshua's friends in Rushville was a young lady his own age, Anne Virginia Ellen Scripps, known as Ellen, a member of one of the town's most prominent families. Ellen's father, the Reverend John Scripps, was an early settler in Rushville, the editor and publisher (until about the time of Joshua's arrival) of its newspaper, the *Prairie Telegraph*, and a lay preacher in its Methodist church.³ The letters which Joshua and Ellen exchanged were full of references to mutual friends and make it clear that they moved in the same social circle. In 1852, one of Ellen's sisters was married to a Sweeney.⁴

But their friendship seems not to have turned into love until the summer of 1858. When Joshua left Ellen that fall to attend the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Keokuk, Iowa, his stage passed the spot "where some years before we walked hand in hand, (and I hope heart in heart) at a fourth of July Celebration." But "some years before" must have been lover's hyperbole in exactly the same way that the months he remained away from Ellen in Keokuk seemed like years. His letters—and Ellen's replies—are too full of the wonder and excitement of a new love for the affair to have been going on very long.

Dr. Sweeney and Joshua's love for Ellen were no doubt important factors in his decision to attend medical college. The selection of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Keokuk, then the Medical Department of the State University of Iowa, probably owed something to the fact that his Uncle Thomas, as the letters reveal, had some connection with the College.⁵

³ The Reverend John Scripps was the uncle of John Locke Scripps (1818–1866), a founder and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, and the great uncle of Edward Wyllis Scripps (1854–1926), founder of the Scripps-Howard chain of newspapers. E. W. Scripps was born and raised in Rushville. See James E. Scripps, *A Genealogical History of the Scripps Family* (Detroit, 1903).

⁴ In 1861 another sister married another Sweeney.

⁵ The uncle was apparently Dr. Thomas Nichols. I wish to thank Marion C. Samo, Acting Medical Librarian, Iowa State Medical Library, Des Moines, and William L. Talbot, President, Lee County Historical Society, Keokuk, for their efforts to help me find more information about him. He is not listed in the Records of the College of Physicians and Surgeons owned by the State Medical Library or in the extant Keokuk directories.

Altogether, Joshua lived in Keokuk from November, 1858, to February, 1859, and from November, 1859, to February, 1860, a total of about thirty weeks. Of the letters he wrote to Ellen, usually every Saturday, five have survived from the first year, and fourteen from the second. In addition, there are several letters written between terms when Joshua was in Macomb or Ellen was in Beardstown, Illinois, where she often visited and helped a married sister with many children, Eliza Scripps Chase. Excerpts from nineteen of these letters are printed here. Mistakes and irregularities of grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been left as they were committed, and no corrections or additions have been added for the sake of clarity without indicating them in brackets.

In much the same way that a motion picture projector can cause a still to spring into life and motion, the letters of Joshua Nichols Speed put a long-passed and long-forgotten era of his life—and Keokuk's—into motion once again. Like all love letters, they contain a great deal of interest chiefly to the original recipient: the agony of love, the torture of separation, the frustration of undependable mails. For this reason, lengthy (and tedious) passages have been deleted and replaced by the customary ellipses. What is left tells a great deal of what it was like to be a medical student in Keokuk in 1858-1860, and how it was to be in love.

* * * *

Keokuk, November 7, 1858

My Dearest Ellen

I told you when I left that I would write to you as soon as I got into my room; but little did I think I would be on the road till late Saturday night. I am now at Uncle's with every one in the room, and as a matter of course I can't write you a regular letter as I would like to. I would like to wait till I am entirely settled and fixed in my room, and then give you at my ease a decription of my trip to this place. But then will it be right to keep her whom I love as I do my own life in suspense unnecessarily long just to suit my ease[?]- Hardly I think.

I did not go to church today—I could not find Uncle's house till about 10 o'clock and of course was too muddy to show my face inside a church.

O Ellen! how long the days are[!] every succeeding day seems longer [than] the last. O! how long will it be, it will seem an age.

Now Ellen I don't call this a letter I hope you will throw it in the fire, and preserve the next as my first, for I will write it as though I had not written this at all. Still, I want you to write as soon as you get this if you have not already written today I shall look for a letter every mail till I get one from you. . . .

* * * *

Keokuk, November 12, 1858

I now commence the pleasantest task I every undertook in my whole life, that of a series of letters to one as near and dear to me as you are. In the note (not the letter for it was not) I sent you a few days ago I promised to give you somewhat of a history of my trip to this place.

From home [*i. e.*, Rushville] to Ripley was sad and dreary enough, I can assure you; but, how much more so was it when, on reaching Ripley and looking at the ground where some years before we walked hand in hand, (and I hope heart in heart) at a fourth of July Celebration, I was now brought to the sad reality of contrasting the difference; then, I was enjoying the company of her for whom I had the very tenderest regard; now, I was leaving the very same one whom I had learned to love above all the world, to be absent four long, long months. . . .

I got to Clayton [Illinois] about nine o'clock and went immediately to Dr. Hubbard's with the expectation of getting off in the evening train; but the Dr. made me take off my shawl and overcoat, and then my boots were changed for Mrs. Hubbard's slippers, and I was very politely informed that I was to stay with them all night, for if I was to leave in the evening train I would get a boat no sooner than by taking a morning train. I was treated just as kindly as a son could

have been. The Dr. always did seem to take a fancy to me though—he seemed very much gratified to think I was going to make an M. D. and not a merchant. I reached Quincy about ten Saturday morning and got a boat about three P.M.

I can't say that I find things in Keokuk just as I would like them by any means, but enough so to induce me to remain. I think by hard study I can be benefited as much here as I would be in St. Louis, I know I can. I am not yet fixed in a room, but will be I hope in a few days.

I am now writing this in Miller Carpenter's office [A. M. Carpenter, M. D., Prosector to Chair of Surgery] which will be my room this Winter. There is, in connection with the office, a very nice little back room, already carpeted, with every convenience except a bed, all of which I am welcome to, and also the use of his books.

I have sent home for them to send me a lot of bed-clothes by way of the rail-road and river, for they have more than they use, and it will be much cheaper for me to pay the freight on them here and back than to give twenty or twenty five dollars for them and then sell them at half what I gave for them when I leave. So you see I will be very well fixed when I *do get fixed*. I board at Uncles which is about a mile from my room. The College building is about half way between. . . .

Answer this soon for I go to the [post]office every mail with my heart in my very mouth.

* * * *

Keokuk, February 5, 1859

I have reflected on myself again and again for saying anything about when I would probably come home. I did very wrong indeed dearest Ellen; but I know you will excuse me after you know all. I supposed then, that the professor of surgery would get along much faster than he has; but at the rate he is now going I will not get away before the last of next week. . . . I have seen a great deal of drinking this Winter; there has been a great deal in the dissecting room. I have not yet visited the Good Templars but want to find time next week to go up. The rum-sellers have threatened Mr. Ross that

he shan't speak again; in consequence of which, he has determined to stay another week, to show them that he can't be run off. If they attempt to interfere, they will find themselves rather roughly treated. There are enough students here from Missouri (Ross is from Missouri) to whip out all the Whiskey Sellers in Keokuk. . . .

I got a letter from Prissie [a sister] this week she is very anxious that I should get through (she don't know that I am through) dissecting. She seems to be afraid it will so harden me that I will not have any feeling; but I think, at least I hope, she is mistaken. . . . Don't expect me before the 25th though I will come as soon as possible.

* * * *

Keokuk, February 12, 1859

The college closes next Thursday and on Friday morning Ennis, Carpenter, Shannon, Barrm [?] McNeal, Osborn & I will start in private conveyance from Keokuk to the railroad where we separate. They all anticipate a lively time of it, so many of us starting together. . . . [Joshua is very anxious to get to Rushville, but] If I leave before the Session closes I cannot get my tickets for attendance, and it closes so soon I had best stay in order to get them.

[Returning to Rushville at the end of February, 1859, Joshua apparently went back to his job as Dr. Sweeney's assistant.]

* * * *

Rushville, June 7, 1859

I suppose it is all right that you should accomodate your sister Eliza. Most asuredly it is. I am sure she will be pleased and think the more of you for your kindness. And ought you not to be the dearer to me for this mark of kindness, when by it you so fully show evidence of that generous spirit I hope to bless my future. While we admit the duty, we may at the same time with propriety deplore the existing necessity of your having to go and be gone two or three *long long* weeks. Oh! how I wish they were past. How I wish Beardstown was on this side of the [Illinois] river. If it was only out of the way [*sic*] how easily I could start here after supper to see you and

get back the same night, whereas as it is I would have to start after dinner one day and get back to dinner the next. It must be evident to you, dearest Ellen, that my future success in my profession depends wholly on my present attention and application, and if so, is it not best that I should apply myself assiduously even though I forego some present pleasure by so doing?

[Joshua has returned to Keokuk for his second year of study, this time living at his uncle's house.]

* * * *

Keokuk, November 9, 1859

I reached Keokuk about 9 o'clock this morning. I left Bardolph yesterday at 8 o'clock. Little did I think this time last year I would commence a correspondence to you from this place at this time. I did not think then that we would spend the present winter so far apart; but so it is Dearest Ellen. I suppose it is all for the best, at least let us think so. I feel less able to be deprived of your society than I did last winter. It does seem that it will be twice as long as it was last. . . .

Uncle Thos tells me that there is prospects for a very full class in College this Winter.

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Keokuk, November 17, 1859

It the time has seemed long to me, as well doubtless as it has to you, since I wrote my last letter, how much longer must the time seem since I last bid you farewell? This is Thursday and to write to you at this time I have to stay from part of the lectures. it is one though which is very dull and not of as much importance as the others. Still I would not stay away to write if I was certain you had got my last letter. . . . I am now looking for a letter from you every mail. I am not as pleasantly situated in regard to letter writing as I was last Winter, but in some respects I am much better. . . .

The class this session is much larger than it was last and I think much more respectable. The first person I saw on going to College was Dudley he came to my seat as soon as he saw me, he saw me first. There are not many of the old students back this session only about ten or twelve. I.C.[?] Shra-

der is not here I was in hopes he would be. I do not know yet that I will be here the whole session. I am still undecided but be it as it may I suppose it will be right to think it all for the best. . . .

* * * *

Keokuk, November 26, 1859

I am truly glad to hear that you are enjoying yourself so well in Beardstown. Don't you think you had better stay during Christmas? if they have such pleasant times now, I should think they would hardly fail to have a nice time Christmas. I would be far from advising you thus if I had the least idea of being in Rushville at that time. But as I do not I would by far [prefer] you would be where you can enjoy yourself best, for it always does me more good to hear from you that you are having a good time than to enjoy it myself. You ask whether you will ever spend a Christmas out of Rushville. I would be glad to think not, for I would like to think it to my interest to live in Rushville all my life. Still I can be happy with you anywhere, you may be satisfied. . . .

You ask me to write oftener than once a week. It would not be impossible, but it would be impossible to do so and attend to my lectures at the same[time]. I can assure you I could with pleasure write to you much oftener than once a week. I could do it with equally as much pleasure as you could experience in receiving them. But then dearest Ellen circumstances are such that I can not write oftener than once a week without missing the afternoon lectures. Saturday afternoon we have no lectures; so I come to Dr. Carpenters office and attend to writing all my letters. I am so situated at Uncles that I cannot write without I do it in my own room without fire, or in the room with all the balance of the family around me. So you see to be free from noise I come to Carpenters office; and even here I have difficulties to contend with, for Carpenter gets to talking sometimes and thus draws my attention from that which I can assure you is of far more interest to me than a conversation with him. . . .

The class in College this session is a much more intelligent looking class than the one of last session and much larger too.

The surgical operations are more numerous than they were last. Today there were four operations, one for amputation, etc. There are several students here who have taken their first course in St. Louis and have come to Keokuk to get their diplomas.

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Keokuk, December 3, 1859

Another week has run its course and shortened my stay here that much as well as brought the usual time for my writing, but I must confess I have so much to say and so little time to say it in I fear as I will not half finish before it is time to mail my letter. I am not as pleasantly situated as I was last winter but I could put up with the inconvenience cheerfully if I was only as well situated in respect to writing to you as I was then. . . .

I received a letter from . . . [Mat, a brother] telling me that he could certainly raise me all the money I needed this winter, and not till then dearest Ellen did I realize the fact that I would not see you for so long a time. . . .

I went to hear Mr. Hawley last Sunday Evening. His subject was "Dancing." I liked him tolerably well only. there is too much egotism about him, just like a great many of those Eastern Men who come West with the idea that they are coming among a set of half barbarians, and seem to be unwilling to acknowledge the contrary, although they have finally to do it. He preaches next Sunday Evening on Intemperance "The cup as a destroyer". . . .

Pa is to move to Rushville next week. Uncle Thomas says "if he were me he would as soon risk practicing in Rushville as anywhere." I wish it was really so and I could believe it.

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Keokuk, December 10, 1859

How I would like when [I] write to you to have just as much time as I wanted just as I did last Winter. I am now commencing to write to you at four o'clock and must stop at dark, dark you know comes very early. . . . The only time I can possibly devote to letter writing is Saturday afternoons. I attend lectures every day all day from nine o'clock to five in

the evening. Now it is necessary for me to read up with the lectures which of course must be done at night, and the only time I have then is from supper till the balance of the family go to rest, which is very early bed time for me. . . .

In reference to my finishing the session, I will stay and finish if I possibly can. I am here now and I intend to finish if possible, as much as I want to get home. If Mat succeeds in getting the money for me, and I am not rejected by the Faculty at the final examination as an unworthy candidate I will certainly bring my diploma home with me. Don't you feel afraid I will be rejected as an unworthy candidate? It is very fortunate I studied hard last Winter for I have no chance to study this[,] scarcely any at all. I would make but poor show if my merits depended on my application this winter, but by close attention to the lectures I am able to acquit myself with credit when quized by the professors. I feel dearest Ellen that it is peculiarly fortunate for me that I applied myself dilligently last Winter. If I had done as most students do I would not have studied any last Winter. They only listen to the lectures the first Winter and wait till the second course of lectures the second winter before they pretend to read after them. Now suppose I had followed the common plan last winter and waited till this before I pretended to read after the lectures? How do you think I would have come out? But poorly I think. I might possibly go through this winter without having read much last. But then it would be but little satisfaction to me to get a diploma feeling that I did not merit it.

I was talking a few days ago with a second course student who took his first course in St Louis. I asked him how he was satisfied with the lectures here. He said he would just as soon attend here as in St Louis[,] that the advantages were quite as good here as they were there. We had three operations today, two this morning and one this afternoon at three oclock. This is the reason I was so late in commencing this letter. . . .

You spoke of having read a novel entitled "A Life for a Life" and express a wish that I would read it. Now dearest Ellen if I can't possibly find time to write you oftener than once a week how can I find time to read this book[?]

Keokuk, December 24, 1859

[Joshua has not received the expected money from his brother Mat, and is very worried.] Thursday I felt so bad that I could not study at all when night came; in fact, I did not make any effort to study and consequently when Friday came I was but illy prepared to answer questions when quized. I made out to do it though, with but little satisfaction to myself, though it may have been done with entire satisfaction to the professor. I have seen as many *ups* and *downs* as any one else of my age, for the past seven or eight years. but I must confess I never [have been] in such suspense before in my life. . . . If Mat can't succeed in getting the money he ought to write to me and let me know it at once and not keep me in suspense this way; it is perfect carelessness on his part, for which he is hardly excusable.

Since coming back to Keokuk and seeing different ones of the students I do not think with Dr. Sweeney that my future success depends on my getting a diploma this winter. A fellow by the name of Hamlin attended lectures here last winter and has come back to finish with the present class. He has been practicing during the Spring Summer and Fall and now comes back with a horse, good clothes (last winter his clothes were very poor indeed) and plenty of money. I do not speak of his bad clothes last winter reproachfully at all, I only do it to show how well he has done. Shrader and I were both well acquainted with him last winter and used to remark to each other what a perfect block head he was, he was not posted on any branch at all. Now this is only one case of several others just like it, of persons who attended one course of lectures last Winter and are now engaged in active practice. Scofield and I were talking about this the other day and in the course of the conversation we came to the conclusion that of the the first course students last Winter the greater part of those were but illy posted were now in active practice. Certainly a "little learning makes a man a fool" The principal part of the lectures will soon be over and the balance of the session will be taken up in things of less importance. So if I should leave I will get the benefit of the greater part of the lectures.

Although it may not be so much to my future prospects to finish this Winter it will certainly be to my future convenience and I shall finish if I possibly can. I hope Mat may be able to get the money. If I attend three months during the present Session I will have to attend that much less during the Session I attend after this; so if I don't finish this session I will never have to be away so long at any rate. Some consolation in that, don't you think so?

If I don't finish this Winter I shall not attend again for one or two Winters. I will not attend next Winter. I shall not take the Dr.'s [*i. e.*, Dr. Sweeney] advice any more but commence to practice at once without a diploma. Probably I can get the Faculty to examine me before I leave and grant me a diploma when I get the money to send them to pay for it. . . . Still dearest Ellen there is no such word in my dictionary as "can't" Mat may send the money yet, although it looks very doubtful, still my motto is "never give up". If Mat does fail to get the money for me I will then try to make some arrangement with the Faculty and if I fail then I will try something else, and if I fail there too, I will go to work and show them that I can practice medicine without a diploma as well as other people. Still I feel satisfied it will yet turn out for the best. At least I will try and think so. . . .

I am getting along with my Thesis much faster than I supposed I would. From what Scofield told me I supposed it would take all my spare time for the next four weeks. When I came home from the lectures in the morning at 12 o'clock I write on it till I return at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I have followed this course during the past week and find at the end that I have almost enough written. So you see it will not trouble me as much as I thought it would. Still I intend to devote my spare time to it from now till I hand it in in hopes that I may better it in some parts as their faults may occur to me by reading it over again and again.

There is a Dr. Wymer—(brother to John B. Wymer of Schuyler Co[unty].) here attending lectures. His wife is at his brothers in Schuyler; he left for Rushville yesterday and was very anxious to have me go with him. Oh dearest Ellen how

I would like to have gone with him; but then duty before pleasure. If I were to lose the time Wymer loses in going to Rushville, hard study during the balance of the session would not enable me to catch up. With Wymer it does not make much difference; he can't keep up with the class anyhow. He has been practicing fifteen years and is very good in Practice, but when he comes to be quizzed on Anatomy, Chemistry etc he is almost [a] perfect blank.

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Keokuk, December 31, 1859

I feel very differently from what I did when I last wrote to you. I received a letter from Prissie last night in which she gave me all the news in Rushville besides telling me that Mat would send the money by Dr. Wymer. I feel now comparatively easy still "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." I suppose though now there is no doubt but I will get it, at any rate I am not in the same state of suspense I was by any means. Dr. Wymer will be here tonight and I will then know all.

During the past week the lectures have been very irregular. we might just as well have had the whole week as two days. Meeker [Daniel Meeker, M. D., Professor of Anatomy] & Harvey [?] have both gone home and Marsh [Wells R. Marsh, M. D., Professor of Chemistry] has been sick. So we have only had two lectures in the forenoon and two in the afternoon. Oh! how I wish the lectures were over and I was on my way home. . . .

I am getting along very well with my thesis. Mays (a student) says that one page of fools cap will make eight pages of thesis paper. I have eight pages [of] fools cap and more already written which according to May's calculation will make about seventy pages thesis paper. The faculty limit us from twenty to fifty pages. So you see I will have to cut mine down some to bring it within the limit. it will be more trouble to do this than to copy the whole of it; it will take time to decide which parts to reject and which to use. . . . I am in hopes the session will close by the middle of February. I heard one of the students say that he heard one of the pro-

fessors say it would. Still I fear it is a mistake. It looks like a *long long* time from now till the 1st of March. There is one consolation, dearest Ellen. I will be through for good if I pass the examination. When I express my fears to any one of the students in regard to this matter, they say as you do that I need have no fears that if their chances were as good as mine and Scofield's they would not be concerned at all about passing. It is a satisfaction to know that others think my chances for passing the examination creditably [to be] so good. Still I can't feel easy about the matter and don't suppose I will till I am through. I wish it was all over. . . .

This is the coldest day we have had this winter—the thermometer stood this morning 18 degrees below zero. The students are all invited to make New Years calls at Dr. Hughes [J. C. Hughes, M. D., Professor of Surgery and Treasurer of the Faculty] and also to Dr. Marshes. I don't expect to call. I want to write to Mr. Ray [probably William H. Ray, a merchant in Rushville] and if I go calling I won't have time to do it. I wish I could make you a New Years call.

* * * *

Keokuk, January 7, 1860

Mat has sent me a draft for nearly all the means I will need, and will send me the balance soon. College will close about the 25th of February. Oh! how I wish it was the 25th of January. Oh! how tired I get sometimes and how *very very* long the time seems to be from now till the close of the session. During Christmas week the lectures were very irregular. . . .

A day or two ago Prof. Harvey was lecturing on Hysteria or more commonly called Hysterics. He said "Gentlemen. I am a married man and have as good a wife as any mortal man, and far be it from me to speak lightly of the character of woman; that man who has a true wife is well off, while that man who has a bad wife is worse than dead. Gentlemen you may often hear of the stubbornness of the brute creation [*sic*], but I can tell you a stubborn woman can beat the d--l himself."

Keokuk, January 14, 1860

I sometimes think I am the luckiest man in the world. Last winter I studied hard when there was no necessity for it, when very few if any of the first course students studied at all. This winter I am unable to study at all of any consequence, and if I had not studied last [winter] I do not know how in the world I would get through this. Now is it not lucky for me? . . .

There is to be a grand party at the college next Wednesday night it has been talked of for a week or two. I had determined not to go but Monday at a call meeting of Profs and Students I was appointed on a committee and will probably have to go. I got off in one corner out of sight so as not to be appointed but it did no good. I was appointed anyhow. If I can get out of it honorably I will. My being on the committee does not require my presence that night. My work will be done before so I think I can get out. I would like to go if you could be here. How I wish you could. I think you would enjoy yourself even if it was among strangers. They are making great preparations for a grand time. . . .

There is a very good location for a physician in Missouri near Uncle James [,] and Uncle Thos. is anxious for me to go there, but I prefer settling near Rushville in order eventually to settle in the place itself. If I thought it was decidedly to my interest to go to Missouri I would not object provided you would like it, but I can't see but I can do as well in Ills. as any where else. With a year or two's practice I will be able to settle where I please. . . .

College will close in about five weeks, but the nearer the end comes the longer the weeks seem. O how long the last will seem. My thesis is most done. I will finish it this next week. I will have thirty pages about the size of this paper on which I write you [the paper measured six inches by eight inches] about an inch larger each way than this.

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Keokuk, January 21, 1860

The party I spoke to you about in my last letter came off on Wednesday evening. It was a grand affair, a perfect jamb all evening. I went but would have much preferred staying at

home[;] but a man has no right always to consult his own feelings on all occasions. I saw Susie was very anxious to go and I knew she could not go without I went with her. Aunt Frances guessed I was going on Susie's account and tried to persuade me not to go, but I told her I was bound to go and persuaded her to go too. So you see I took Aunt Frances and Susie too. When we got to the college I told Susie to take care of herself and I waited on Aunt the balance of the evening except at supper time. When supper was announced I took Aunt, Susie & Miss Hurst to the table and as the crowd was so thick it was as much as I could do to get them anything to eat and did not have time to eat any myself. I got one biscuit and a piece of meat. There was plenty to eat but the difficulty was to get at it on account of the crowd. It is said to be the largest party ever given in Keokuk. From eight to nine was taken up in tableaux[;] from that till supper in promenading. After supper the dance commenced and lasted till four in the morning. The band was employed and the music was good. I left at half past eleven, but Susie was anxious to stay longer. I could have gratified [her] but Aunt wanted to be at home. The next day I think the class was the sleepest set I ever saw, there was not more than half the class present. The Professors also seemed to feel the affects of the dissipation. Marsh told the class next morning that he did not feel much like lecturing and he hoped none in the class felt as bad as he did. Marsh, Meeker and Hughes all danced till four in the morning.

Meeker likes fun[.] Wednesday morning at his hour for lecturing on anatomy he came in the lecture room dressed up like a deck hand on a steamboat. He came in and bowed very politely to the class and said, "Gentlemen as I understand tableaux will be the order of the day I wish to make the introduction." Then followed such an uproar of laughing and stamping as one seldom hears. It was fifteen minutes before he could get the class still and his own face straight in order to proceed with his lecture. He did not laugh out himself but you could see him twist his face in all kind of shapes to keep from laughing. The lectures have been very irregular all the week on account of the party. I heard one of the students say

that he heard Hughes say that college would close by the 20th. I hope and trust it may. I am getting very tired of this place.

* * * *

Keokuk, January 24, 1860

I am now at College listening to the lectures and writing to you at the same time. No one knows but what I am taking notes. . . .

I understand College will close on the night of the 22nd and if so I will start home on the 23d. Hope you will be able to be at home by that time. Don't make yourself sick waiting on your sister. . . .

My thesis is done. I had it bound last week and as soon as I can punctuate it I will hand it to the Faculty.

* * * *

Keokuk, January 28, 1860

By a vote of the Faculty at their last meeting college will close on the 22nd next. I fear very much you will not be at home so soon as that. I almost wish it would continue longer.



THE OLD KEOKUK MEDICAL COLLEGE

I would not mind it so much if you were in Beardstown only on a visit. I could then come there and see you, but as it is, it would hardly be right in me to come and see you and thus distract your attention from your sister Eliza, who probably needs the whole your strength will allow you to bestow. I hope she will not be so bad as not to allow you time to write as usual.

In my letter of last Saturday I gave you an imperfect account of the party and as I suppose it will reach you before this I will not take room to repeat it in this letter. I will say though in reference to it, that it has been the cause of some bad feeling among the members of the faculty and in consequence I have also suffered some. Some time ago I paid Prof Hughes \$25 on my diploma and took his receipt for the same. A few days ago I went to Prof. Knowles [Freeman Knowles, M. D., Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine] and gave him Hughes receipt and \$5 and asked him for a receipt of \$30. He refused to give it and said that Hughes' receipt was worth nothing. I told him that Hughes receipt was good and I felt satisfied the Faculty would recognize it as good [even] if [he] wouldn't, and furthermore if it was necessary I could prove it to him by law. Profs. Hughes, McGugin [D. L. McGugin, M. D., Professor of Physiology and President of the Medical Faculty] and Harvey all say I did perfectly right, and that Knowles has acted wrong. It all grows out of the party and as it will take too much time to explain fully I will tell you all about it when I come home.

* * * *

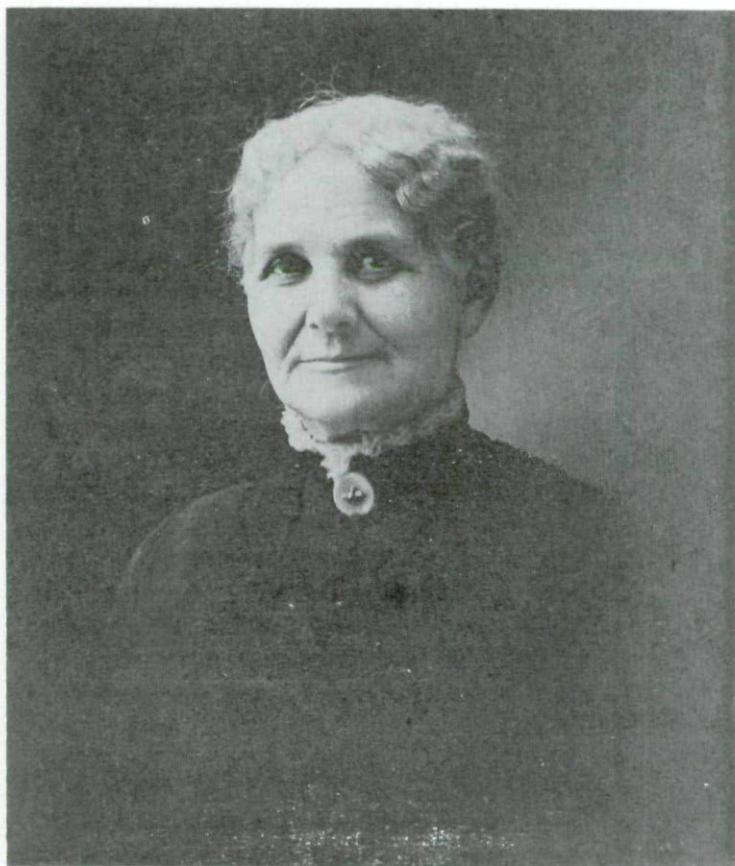
Keokuk, February 11, 1860

Next Monday week has been fixed on as the day for the examination and the following Wednesday (the 22nd) as the day to close. I expect to start home on the morning of the 23d and may get to Rushville on the 24th. The presbyterian prayer meeting is held on Wednesday evening and on account of it there has been some talk of changing the night to close the college to the 23d, so if they do I will not get home before the 25th.

After receiving his degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Joshua—now Dr. Speed—began to practice medicine in Ripley, Illinois. He married Ellen Scripps on June 13, 1861, and a few months later took his bride back to their beloved Rushville, where he continued to practice until his death in 1900.



DR. JOSHUA SPEED



ELLEN SCRIPPS SPEED

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