

An Emigrant's Letter in 1840

The following letter, written by an early Quaker settler in Virginia, was submitted by Miss Alice Savage of Harvey, Illinois. It contains much practical information for the emigrant from the east, concerning travel, supplies, prices and opportunities for acquiring a homestead in Iowa.

To: Edwin Terrell
Care of Walter Crew
Mount Pelier
Hanover County, Virginia 8th mo, 12th day, 1840

Dear Friend,

I hasten to give thee what information I can relative to thy inquiries.

First, steamboat is the cheapest and most expeditious mode of traveling. There are two ways of traveling on boat, cabin or deck passage. Of course, deck passage is the most economical way where one finds his own provisions. And at all stopping places or towns along the river provisions are to be had.

The charge depends on the stage of the river (high or low water) from Wheeling to St. Louis, say from \$10.00 to \$12.00, sometimes a good deal less. I am not able to say precisely what the charge for cabin passage will be as the charge is very much decreased since I traveled that way. It's a pleasant and commodious mode. On these points thou can obtain information at Wheeling or Pittsburgh.

As for traveling it by land, its a way I never will try again though one may make it cheap enough by taking provision and feed along with them. They can be purchased all along the road, and what with yourselves and your necessary baggage, will be load enough for your horses on so long a journey. From Baltimore to Wheeling or Pittsburgh there are public conveyances via railroad or stage. Railroad is the cheapest and most comfortable.

Second query. Virginia money is very good, though to buy government land tis necessary to have specie, and no other will do except the bank of Missouri in St. Louis. While on the subject of money, I will just mention if thee could by Missouri bank bills in the east thee could make a good per cent by it as that bank is perfectly safe and good in the west, and then thee could draw on the bank for any kind of money.

Third. Wheat, corn, oats, rye, and barley are the grains raised here, though the price is very low owing to the pressure of the times. Wheat pays 30 to 37 cents in Burlington on the Mississippi river, corn is at 10 to 12 cents and other things in proportion, though when trade is brisk wheat is worth from 50 to 75 cents, corn 20 to 25 cents and oats 20 cents. Last fall heavy pork (say 200 lbs. per hog) demanded \$3.00 per 100 lbs. cash or goods. These hard times people have to take goods or produce. Money is very scarce here.

Raising tobacco would be the most profitable business. I consider this good tobacco country. I have raised some the last two seasons and as fine as I ever saw, not much troubled with the worm. I am satisfied if a man who is rightly fixed for it and understands the business would make money sufficiently fast. I believe it will bring \$3 to \$4 per hundred.

Fourth. As to the health of the country there has been

and is now, a great deal of sickness throughout, but in the main I consider it as healthy a country as any other. Indeed, very much so for a new country, much more so than Illinois or Indiana both of which states, I am told, are under a heavy visitation. I hear tis a common thing everywhere this season.

Fifth. I do not think there is any government land about Salem¹ without tis out in the large prairie without wood or water. And I doubt if there is any nearer than this place which is about 15 miles from Salem. I don't think improved or second hand land can be had for less than \$5.00 per acre, and much there cannot be had for \$10.00 or \$15.00 per acre, though at chance times one may come across a discontented fellow and make a bargain for the ready money. The county about Salem is thickly settled and in an advanced state of cultivation. There is a large meeting of friends² in Pleasant Prairie³ which is about 7 miles north from here (25 from Salem) where second hand land may be obtained for say \$3 to \$5 per acre. Its a beautiful country and settling fast.

There is a small quantity of government land, about 200 acres, in this immediate neighborhood, of the very best quality and beautiful, as well as in a healthy part of the country. The only objection is a scarcity of white oak for fencing, but an abundance of other kinds such as Jack oak, hickory, basswood, elm, etc. There is a plenty of white oak land convenient to be had for money at \$3 to \$4.00 per acre. Thirty to fifty acres of good white oak is enough for a moderate quantity of fencing. Jack oak, not black jack, makes a tolerable fence rail.

Seventh. A man moving so far had better sell off

¹ Located in the southern part of Henry county.

² The Society of Friends.

³ The second community of Friends in Iowa. Soon came to be called Pleasant Plain. Located in northern Jefferson county. See Louis Thomas Jones, *The Quakers in Iowa*, 1914.

everything that would be cumbersome. First rate horses may be obtained here for \$25 to \$50, and good horse wagons for \$50 to \$60.

Eighth. As to bringing out goods to do a business or sell for cash, I think it not advisable at this time as money is very scarce, but it would be an excellent plan to have goods to get work done. Its just as good as money for that purpose. In breaking land its necessary to have a large team of oxen, and goods are good pay.

I think \$150 in goods would be laudable sideline in the way I mentioned. They will not go amiss anyhow and thee might get some cash occasionally. There are a good many stores in the country. I would advise thee to lay in thy goods at St. Louis should thee take water. Thee can get them as cheap there as anywhere else, and by paying cash it used to be customary for the merchants to deduct 6 per cent. Cottons of all sorts would sell well, and a few bundles of spun cotton, callicoes, a few woolens such as fulled linsey and jeans, dye stuff, some light chinaware, knives and forks, sauspans, sharp shears, such light hardware as is in common use, and all kinds of groceries. I was going to say sugar, but there is so small a profit on it, and not very salable. Upper harness and sole leather have very ready sale. Leather will bring cash if anything will. Sole leather sells for 25 cents and harness for 33 cents per lb. I don't know how upper sells.

Be careful and get them as cheap as thee can as goods sell nearly as low here as in the east. I think a few saddles will sell well in barter, say 2 or 3, and a few blankets would be a good article. I would lay out more in leather than anything else. It's an article of prime necessity. Be sure they are all articles of good quality.

I don't know how thee could better dispose of thy money these times than to invest it in land. Its a sure

living at least, and with so small a sum where could thee buy land to so much advantage as in a new and flourishing country where land is cheap?

If thee brings goods thee had best to land them at Fort Madison, and put them in store until thou hast located thyself. Salem is about 25 miles from Fort Madison, and there thou can look for a place. There is a 20 acre piece in my neighborhood that has some improvements on it. The owner is willing to take goods as barter for the greater part. The limits of my paper do not allow me to say more that might be said.

Thine respectfully,
Lewis Schofield

P.S. If thee can find thy way to my house I will endeavor to assist thee in thy enquiries after land. I live in Wilson's house. Find thy way to Wilson's prairie and enquire for me.

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