

FROM INDIANA TO IOWA

Edited by ELEANORE CAMMACK

The three letters printed below were presented to me recently by my father, James O. Cammack, of Greencastle, Indiana. They were written by his parents, Quakers, who migrated to Iowa either from eastern Indiana or western Ohio. They left a farm near Richmond, Indiana, which I cannot locate. Because of the superlative land, Iowa was favorite territory for migrating farmers in 1850's.

Overman's Ferry, where my grandparents made their first home in Iowa, was on Cedar river, and actually only a store, postoffice and a stop on the stagecoach route between Muscatine and Iowa City. When the Mississippi and Missouri railroad (now a part of the Rock Island System) was extended through Iowa in 1855, the stagecoach road was built to run through Atalissa. My grandparents moved to Atalissa and lived there until 1859. Then they purchased a farm on the north side of the Iowa river about five miles from Iowa Falls.

The steamboat "Quaker City," on which they travelled from Cincinnati to St. Louis, was a packet of 214 tons, built in 1853 and operated out of Pittsburgh. These letters have been copied very carefully, retaining exact spelling and capitalization, in order to retain the original flavor and individuality.

Overman's Ferry Iowa Apr 5th 1855

Dear Parents

We have at last landed (yesterday) at our destination But not all well; having all caught verry bad colds on the Boats: but none of us are dangerous. We landed, at Keokuk and wagoned the Balance of the way up here, having got tired of the water and all Boats in general By the time we got to Keokuk; and I will here say to all my friends who have any expectations of moving to Iowa; to come when the roads are good, and come in a wagon by so doing they will save a heavy expense much trouble and anxiety, and probably some of their property. However we did

not lose any thing but that Box of Roots and cuttings the front bolster of my wigon, and the covers of the horses; the latter were certainly hooked by some of the light fingered, gentry; it was a cold night and I suppose they had need of them poor things! I hope they will gain much comfort from the comfort; and that the cloak will serve to screen them from the wrath to come. We kept in company with Stratton's and Thatcher untill we arrived at Saint Louis, Where we parted. They concluding to wait 3 days for a Boat that was going over the Rapids and we concluded that it would not pay to wait that long in such a place as the Mound City, it is a perfect Babel of a place, yea: worse than that, if you want correct picture of St. Louis, just read the description of Babylon as given in Revelations, and you have it to a tea; I forgot to tell you of the forepart of the journey; well we did not get off from Cincinnati until fifth day morning after we started; we took passage on Steamer Quaker City, "Oh, whats in a name!" She was rather a hard Boat, poor accommodations of every kind, and high passage costing us \$50 to St. Louis \$9 a piece for us and 5 for all of the children \$8 a head for the horses, \$5 for the wagon, and 35 cents per cwt Boxed freight; and from St. Louis up \$4 for person \$2 the children, 3 for horseses per head \$3 for wagons and 15 cents for freight. landed in Saint Louis on first day the 25; and in Keokuk on 4th day following, and then went from thence to Salem 40 miles, Staid 3 days at two of my Cousins, and my half Brotherer's and from thence came up here 60 miles from Salem by way of Mount pleasant Crawfordsville, Fredonia on Iowa River, and thence up Cedar River to this place, the roads are excelent better than any of yours, pikes: and take it all together I think it is a very Beautiful Country But it will take a ful round some of labor to to make it "Blossome as the Rose".

Well there some land rented for us but no house on it so we will have to live with our Cousins untill they canna build one on land; it dont take long to build a house in this Country, about 3 days being sufficient when the get the lumber on the ground. We have opened one of our boxes the one that had the Queensware in it and found the dishes badley Broken up but there is enough left to eat off of, bad place these Boats; I hauled a load of wood this evening went from 4 to 5 miles after it long distance to haul but nothing like getting use to any thing I suppose. Well I have given you rather a hasty sketch of things you must spell it all out as best you can; I would write more but I am going Muscatine to morrow to get some things Commence Housekeeping once more: and I have not time to write any more at present but at a more

convenient season I will give you a detailed account of all that has transpired. So I remain yours affectionately

JAMES CAMMACK

P S I guess Lib will finish it or if she dont she says she will write soon

Dear Mother & Sister,

I expect you would like to hear a few words from me. I feel thankful that we have arrived here safe, after a long and tiresome journey I have rode about four days on the top of the boxes I feel well and hearty. except cold the children have worst colds they ever had & are as cross they well can be, but I dont think it much wonder for they have seen enough to turn them perfectly wild. Rebecca, thee would think something about going crazy if had heard the noise that I have. of all the children on the boat I never seen the like, just a continual noise and uproar so many families of movers I just had to nurse Calvin all the time & keep on the lookout for Oliver and Afred,

We had quite a sociable company, on the first boat. I got so well acquainted that it seemed like leaving home when we parted. I have not time to write much this time. But I expect you would like to know how I like Iowa, I cant tell you much about it now, only I washed some the day after we came & I could not hold the clothes on the line while I could pin them, it looks kind o dreary away out here in the pararie. We have a little room to go in not much larger than your little bed room,

But maybe it will answer as we have got nothing much to put in it. I am so sorry our dishes are nearly all broken. I must now conclude, I coud write a great deal more but time will not permit. I will write again soon read this if you can they have been walking over the floor and shaking me so I could scarcely wřite at all. Affectionately yours,

ELIZABETH CAMMACK

Oversmans Ferry, Iowa, 5th mo. 5th 1855

Dear Sister

Perhaps thee would like to know how we are getting along by time. I expect you have fancied more than once you see us in our little cabin out on the pararie. We are still living with Robinsons or we have a rom to ourselves. I dout but we will have to stay here all summer, as there is know house on the place for us. James has to go about one mile to his work; as for living we have a ten gallon keg of sugar house molasses, half a barrel of sugar some bread and meat & that's about all. but we seem to have about as

much as our neighbors, with the exception of a cow. I have not eat more than a tablespoon full of butter since we left you. for I have not seen any that was fit eat. James expects to go to a sale next week and see if he can get a cow. people in general have not as much to live on here as you have there. We have in our room a cooking stove light nice pair of bedsteads, trunnel bed, set of winsor chairs, table kind of a frame with shelves for a cupboard. One of the boxes serves as a bureau, O, thee don't know how handy. I can do everything by just turning round once or twice, step of the stove heart right into bed. We do not see many log houses here, generally frame. Robinson's had not been in this house more than a month when we came here. There is nothing done to it; except weatherboarded, loose floor & partition. not a shrub or tree near us, except the little rose bushes which the pararie is covered with, it looks very pretty here now, the grass is just high enough to make it look nice, the blue violets, or (Jonny-jumpups) are as thick as they can stand. and other little flowers which seem to diversify the field of nature The nearest neighbor is about a quater of a mile They say here they have counted upwards of seventy house insite, but I think some of them are several miles off, farther than I can see, We have to hawl wood 7 miles. Rachel and I have been shoveling chips and *dirt* for about week.

This fourth day morning, commenced seventh day evening I have to steal a few minutes now and then when ever Calvin is asleep. he is verry troublesome, just got to walking, pulls the chairs to the table climbs on them in all kind of mischief, as every thing is so handy for him. I have got my washing & ironing done for this week, had quite a windy time of it, the wind blew so hard second day, whist I was drawing a bucket of water my dress blew right over my head had the bucket most up let go the windlass, and I guess it made things fly—it has been verry windy here this spring, there has not been but two or three calm days since we have been here. cold and dry

We had quite a storm here two or three weeks ago it blew so hard that the water beat in till the floor was quite wet it hapened so not to wet our bed James had to stand & hold the door two or three houses that were not occupied were blown off their foundation. they were set upon blocks. Our neighbors (new comers) took their shed roof off, they had, but two or three days before their house burned down, so they had to go into the smokehouse to live, saved most of their things—

I think it verry pretty country here & the soil good but when that's said, that's all,—timber is so scarce and finally every thing else. I dont know as I shall see a current, cherry or apple this year, They say there is commonly plenty of wild gooseberry, black-berry, plums crabapples, in the timber—We can get most any

thing at Muscatine by paying the *money*. James has got in ten acres of wheat, six of oats, going to put in 30 acres of corn. he is not going to look for land till after harvest. Henry Robinson expects to go with him and get land together if they can. I dread the job of ever moving again, although I want us get a home of our own, we are living now as, I said I never would live, that is to go in with a family, but I guess we will get along verry well, if I dont make a fuss, for Rachel is a mild harmless kind of a woman and a verry nice housekeeper thats what I have not seen before since I came into Iowa, some places we stopped at, I would gather my cloak up and hold it off the floor—soil thick enough [to] spout corn, the last day we traveled we could hardly find a place to stay at away out in the pararie and night coming on, it kind'o' scared me. we traveled between 8 and 9 o'clock, found a cabin at last, where they took pity on us and kept us—

We have not been, to meeting since we left you it is twelve miles to Red Cedar meeting, it seems quite strange when firstday comes nothing said about meeting, no friends near us. except Rachel **here** she belongs to meeting and would like to be in friends settlement. We are going to Red Cedar to meeting as soon as James gets through with plowing he wants the horses to have some rest,— Our children get along verry well together, they have two little girls the oldest is some older than, Oliver, the other about like Alfred

R. I am almost sorry I ever made my carpet for I fear it will be a long time before I will need it no place to keep anything; have not got room for the old one—about half our dishes got broken but we have got as many now as we have room for—

We are now about as well as common, got over our colds mostly, that we caught in coming, although I am not verry well myself nor never am as *thee knows*

I must now draw this badly connected letter to a close, I have given a general history, I want to write to Rachel Je soon. Phebe & Almira, how I would like to hear from them. If Mother has been out do write and tell me all about them, write anyhow as the[e] said the[e] would answer letters! Now dont let every body see this because it come from Iowa. Now dear sister, I could say a great deal more if I could see thee, but now think we are widely separated by land and water, at least it seemed a long watery road to me. never do I expect to travel that road again. I never want to witness such scenes again. I have often read such. it seemed as it was nothing to see and hear of a person falling overboard. The mate of the boat fell in, the wheel struck him & he sunk to rise no more, at the same time there was another swimming for life we could see his head above the water about a

quarter of a mil off, he at last reached a skiff he was about on the point of sinking.

And whilst we were at St. Louis I was in one end of the boat looking out at steamer coming up she came up by the [side?] of the one that we was in and stopped whilst sitting I saw a man fall overboard he flounced about and then sunk. that was enough for me. O, tis of no use for me to write any more. Please write soon My love to you all. Affectionately thy sister

ELIZABETH

R. H. Hadley

The Cammacks went to Iowa, my father was told, because my grandfather had contracted what was believed to be tuberculosis. The state's rugged climate and strenuous farm life must have agreed with him because he lived to be seventy-seven years old. My grandmother, who gave birth to eight children, died there at the age of forty-six, in a typhoid fever epidemic.

Kodagraph copies of these letters are to be found in the Earlham College Library, Richmond, Indiana.

EARLY PROPOSAL OF A MORATORIUM

Gov. Henry Dodge: Owing to the present embarrassed state of the currency of this territory, I recommend for the consideration of the legislative assembly, the passage of a law granting a stay of execution for one year on all judgments that may be obtained in the different courts of record. The enactment of a law to that effect would prevent the ruin of many whose property will be liable to sale at great loss. Debts have been created when bank notes of different banks were in general circulation in this territory, by many of the most industrious and enterprising citizens, who, no doubt, believed they would be able promptly to meet their engagements. A forced sale of their property under the existing execution laws, would not only deprive the debtor of the means of support, but, in many cases, would prevent the creditor from recovering his debts.—Second Annual Message, Nov. 7, 1837, to the Territorial Legislative Assembly.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.