

Letters of an Engineering Student in the 1880's

Edited by EARLE D. ROSS

Dr. Ross, Iowa State University professor emeritus and school historian, has been a member of the faculty since 1923 and is a widely recognized authority on the history of midwestern agriculture. A past president of the Agricultural History Society, he edited *A Century of Farming in Iowa*, 1946, and has contributed a number of articles to historical journals. His books include *A History of Iowa State College*, 1942, and *Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey*, 1951.

George L. Schermerhorn, the writer of these letters from the Iowa State Agricultural College where he was a student in the mechanical engineering course, 1884-1887, to his family in Jefferson, Iowa, was born at Portage City, Wisconsin, in 1868. His parents were natives of New York. The father, Winfield S. Schermerhorn, after taking a degree at Albany Medical College had moved to Wisconsin where he practiced his profession until joining the Union army as a surgeon. Following the war, he served a term in the state legislature and four years as a collector of internal revenue, after which he came to Jefferson, Iowa, in 1870 to resume his medical work. Of the four children Hattie and George were born in Wisconsin and Grace and Mary in Iowa. (See *Biographical and Historical Record of Greene and Carroll Counties, Iowa*. Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1887, pp. 255-256.)

As the letters clearly indicate, the conscientious young student devoted himself sedulously to his studies without indulging in the few distractions that the simple college regime offered. His only relaxation was in occasional lectures, concerts, and hikes. His very modest requests for money show rare frugal and prudential habits, as does his interest in his father's business concerns. Such purposeful application was to find compensating reward in the winning of the valedictory in the largest class to that time that included such distinguished members as Spencer A. Beach and Niels E. Hansen, horticulturists; Curtis M. Canady, bridge engineer; Charles F. Curtiss, animal-husbandryman and dean; Esther Crawford, librarian; and Edwin A. Kirkpatrick, educational psychologist.

Incidental reference to fellow students, mainly engineering associates or residents of his home town, suggest no basis for life-long friendships with either sex. (He did not marry until 1900.) Young George's interests were indubitably intellectual rather than social.

With but the two traditional branches of engineering available the clear-visioned youth loaded his course with all the theory and applications that were available in engineering and physics in the developing electrical discipline. His career in this phenomenally expanding industry would more than fulfill the glowing prediction of the class prophesy, culminating as it did in years of productive service in the transportation division of General Electric. This achievement, as he would have been the first to admit, owed much to his thorough instruction. For whatever the limitations of surroundings and crudity of "activities," the students of these years, whether they appreciated it or not, were most fortunate in the high caliber of the teaching staff. Any college of the time might have welcomed scientists like Basset, Budd, Pope, Bessey, Halsted, and Osborn and a humanist like Barrows. Unhappily for the College, most of these men left for other institutions or occupations during or in the years immediately following this quadrennium. The Agricultural College in this period was experiencing an instability of change and transition, of which the serious-minded student seemed unaware or unconcerned. Following the removal of Welch, from December, 1883, to July, 1887, the presidential tenures of Knapp, Budd (acting), Hunt, and Chamberlain had followed in confusing succession. In college routine much of the old ways lingered. Instruction and living still centered in Old Main, supplemented by makeshift laboratories and "cottages" for underclass men. Daily chapel and paternal supervision still prevailed. But there were evidences of the new academic climate. Outside political interference and inside dissention were being discredited. The compulsory manual labor system was abolished. Campus telephones and electric lighting and power were being installed, and the foundation of a student health service was being laid by the able Dr. David S. Fairchild. Teaching methods were improved, laboratory practice made

more realistic, and experimentation more rational. And, as always, the real test of the College was in its end product of trained and adaptable alumni.

The letters are in the Schermerhorn collection recently acquired by the manuscript division of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives. The two sole survivals for the underclass years reflect the typical school boy carelessness in spelling and punctuation. The marked improvement in the senior year is no doubt an evidence of the effectiveness of his training in composition as applied in his technical papers.

Ames Feb 28 /84

Dear Father I got here about 6 o'clock last evening and I have been fixing up my room today. My room mate's name is Ernest Miller. He appears to be a very nice companion and lives in Des Moines. I got here just in time for supper last night and after that Mr Coe and I came over to the cottages where he found one of his old school mates and he invited us to sleep with him last night, so we made our bed on the floor. This morning I went to the Steward office where I made my deposit of \$19.00 having paid room rent \$2.00. Then I went to the president's office where I gave in my examination papers which they said were all right and then they gave me my entrance ticket. I have been over to the workshop 2 or 3 times this afternoon and I think It it is very nice. everything seems to be so nice and clean. The class in mechanics will begin in 2 or 3 days. We have a good bedstead & table and stove in our room but only one chair so I suppose you better send my camp chair I have got acquainted with 5 or 6 boys here and everything seems very pleasant. I am going to write to Evert tomorrow. There is a post office in the main college building also a book and stationery store. When you write put the words (Agricultural College) then they will bring the mail to my room. I want you to send me Aunt Nettie's address. Give my love to Hattie, Lou, Leon, Harry, Grace, Mary Ma and all the rest of them Write soon

Your Affectionate son
Geo Schermerhorn

Ames May 11, 85

Dear Mother

I meant to have written before but have neglected it. I am through with Trig as I am glad to say I think I got a pretty good mark but I have not found out yet. I think I had 9 examination on the whole thing put together. We had an examination in Physics and only 6 or 8 in the class passed & I happened to be one of the lucky ones that did pass. There are about 45 in the class. We had an exam in Botany Thursday I have a good deal to do in collecting plants & classifying them for my herbarium I have about 20 & have to get 30 more. I might get up a herbarium of the flowers in your flower garden this summer & give them the latin name & then you can learn the names & see how it goes. 50 names that average 25 letters in each is not such a nice job. I would like to go home decoration day but I will have to go with the batallion wherever they go. Pa wrote that the girls had a birthday party I wonder how they got along How does Hattie & Harry & Lou get along. Does Harry stay with you most of the time. You tell him to write to me as I would like to see one of his letters. There is not much left of the sleeves you made me as I got nitric acid on them & ate them all up. The bottom part of my pants show all the colors of the rainbow. One fellow sat down on a chair that had some acid spilt on it & it ate the seat of his pantaloons out & such is life in this part of the country I was out surveying last week & as it was so warm & not used to the sun it did not feel very well that night. I find it easier to read your letters than it is for me to answer them. I will try & write to Hattie & Lou before long. I send my love to all.

Your Son Geo

I. A. C., Ames, Iowa, Sept. 6, 1885

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter Friday. I am not going to the fair. You said in your letter that he had moved. Did you mean Evert. I wrote to him & probably he did not [get] the letter if he moved. I am glad to hear you are going to Wisconsin. I want to know just when you go through so that I can see you. I want to go home when you come back

as you will get back on Friday & I could go with you. It has been raining a great deal lately & has been quite cold so that I have had a fire part of the time. There has been a slight frost here one or two nights lately, but have done no damage. There was a concert in the Chapel last night. There were 3 Singers. They had song service today and there was very fine singing. The president made the announcement that he was trying to have Beecher & Talmage¹ come here to lecture some Saturday night & preach on Sunday sometime this time. If they do come you want to be sure to come & hear them. Everything is going smoothly this term & I think Pres Hunt is doing very well as he does all he can to help the students & make things as pleasant as possible. I hope ma's hand is doing well. I suppose the girls will start to school before long & will leave ma alone most of the time. I have not heard from Hattie for quite a while. Do you know Laura Willard's address? When she was in Des Moines she wrote to me and I have never written to her since. I am taking more exercise now than I have been. I and two or three other boys walk 2 or 3 miles every recreation hour. I like this term better than any other that I have had. Write soon. Love to all

Yours Affectionate Son

Geo.

Ames Mch 3rd 1886

Dear Father

I have been studying all the evening on the subject of electric light machines. The Prof gave me that subject to write upon for my dissertation this term which will require some time to write as it will be from 20 to 35 minutes in length. I have been making drawing the last 2 afternoon so that the Freshmen can go to work in the shop making patterns for castings to be used in the shop. The girls from Jeff here are quite homesick & say they would like to be home for a while. I was thinking that I might possibly take geology in addition to what I have now although it is not in the regular course. A Geology cost 3.75 & if I took it I would

¹ The noted preachers and lecturers, Henry Ward Beecher and T. DeWitt Talmadge. Evidently the ambitious young president was unable to secure such noted talent.

need that much as I had to get my drawing instruments which I did not expect to. I would like to have you let me know what you think about taking it. I think I will like psychology very well. My room mate is not here yet but I think he will come Saturday. I am the only one in the class in mechanics now. There will be another who will come in about 2 weeks so that I will be alone till then. The Pres. has made a number of changes in the rules this term especially such as regard to go to Ames, etc. I have to go to class now. Love to all.

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

Ames May 2, 1886.

Dear Father

I rec'd a letter from you Friday also the papers. I did not miss very much by going home so that I have caught up all right. There came near being a fire in the shop last night. About 1 ton of coal that was near the boiler caught fire & if it had not been put out just when it was the whole building would have been burned. Shermann Coe when [went] to Des Moines Friday to stay over Sunday by what he said I think they live close to where Evert does. Are you going down to Des M. this month. If you do be sure & come out to the College next Saturday will be pay day I will have to pay for 1 mo board also for the Sanitary fee. It will be about \$10.50. I think it would be well to send a circular to Herman Knapp. He is the Prof of Agriculture. Last fall they lost a great many hogs on the farm. There are quite a number of hogs on the farm all the time & if they came down with the cholera & he would try it it would be a good thing. Did you send circulars to those that I gave you the names of. If you want more I can get them as it is very easy as there are students from all parts of the state & if you want names from any particular part I think I can get them.² Write Soon.

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo

² This year marked one of the severe periodical outbreaks of the epidemic. The Doctor had evidently concocted one of the numerous pur-

Ames Ia May 9th 86.

Dear Father

I have not heard from you for more than a week. I have a great deal to do but am getting along nicely. I was drawing all day yesterday & drew 1 plate & commenced another. After this I will have to work in the shop Saturdays as there is another class commencing shop practise & there is not room enough for all so that the Jun & Senior Class work on Saturday. I took my final examination last week & passed at 396. I take up in its place Resistance of materials during the rest of the term. Are you going to Des Moines as you were thinking of when I was home. The straw-berries that I brought with me had worked some and tasted pretty strong. There was a nick on the under side of the cover which let the air in so they had fermented some. I believe the Board meets this week to elect a new president. I want to hear what success you are having in getting replies from the men who you have sent circulars too. Yesterday was pay day. The board will come to about \$10.50. I will also have to get a book on Resistance of Materials which cost \$2.75, as soon as I can. I want to hear from you often. Also from ma & the girls. Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo -

 Ames May 16/86

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter a few days ago. You said that you sent me some pieces from the Register but I failed to find them. If you would give me the date of the papers I could read them in the library. Chamberlin of Ohio was elected president of the college. Hunt will stay here the

ported remedies. As it proved, relatively effective immunization was not to come, after long and persistent effort, until the second decade of the present century. E. D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, 1951), 132 and references. For the epidemic in the college herd at this time, see Henry Wallace, *Uncle Henry's Own Story of His Life* (Wallace's Publishing Co., Des Moines, Iowa, 1919) III, 48-49. Following the resignation of Seaman Knapp as professor of agriculture, his son Herman, who was to devote most of his career to the business interests of the College, was placed in temporary charge.

rest of the term. Prof Bassett gave Randall & I complimentary tickets to a concert in Ames last night as we were the only ones in his junior classes. It was about the nicest concert I ever heard. They have been playing in Des Moines the last week. C. F. Curtis[s] that you spoke of is in my class & is the editor of the Students farm journal.³ Cora went home yesterday & said she was going to stay a week. I do not think she has much to do if she can go & stay that long. I have a few names that I will send you. In talking with some of the boys I find that in some parts of the state people do not try to raise hogs as much as a few years ago as the cholera had killed almost all the hogs & farmers were not apt to try to raise them after that but raised cattle instead. I ought to pay my board as soon as possible as I should have paid it 1 week ago Saturday. I hope to hear from you soon. Love to All

Your affectionate Son Geo.

Ames May 27 86

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter last night. I am glad to hear you are all well. I am having examinations now 2 or 3 times a week as it is getting near the end of the term. There will be only 4 more weeks of school. The battallion will go to Atlantic Monday for Decoration. I need a pair of shoes and would like to get them Saturday if I can I had to get a new book & will need \$5 to \$6. Prof Bassett has gone to Chicago to see about getting some new machines for the shop.

Your Affectionate Son
Geo.

Ames June 13, 86

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter Friday night. I have had hardly time to write for the last week. I had examinations last week & will have them every day this week. I have all my drawings done & only have one more day shop practise. I have worked all day Saturdays for 2 or 3 weeks so as not to

³ This publication was issued by the student Agricultural and Horticultural Society, Sept. 1884-Aug. 1887.

have shop work during examination week. I do not know when I will be through, but will be home as soon as I get through with my examinations. I do not know of anything in particular to write.

Would like to hear from you. How are you feeling.

Love to All

Yours Affectionate Son

Geo

[Top of letter page torn off, no date]

from you for a few days, but rec'd Bee on Friday. I have not been feeling well for the last few days. It has been such hot weather and the food has not been very good. I have a bad headache so that I do not feel much like studying. I went down to meet the girls ' it was hot walking back as it was at noon and I have not felt well since. I am having good work in the shop. I commenced yesterday making some machine taps. They are used for cutting threads

[part missing]

How is Ma feeling now?

Your Affectionate Son Geo

Ames Ia Aug 27, 86.

Dear Mother

I rec'd your letter today & was very glad to hear from you. I have been feeling much better for the last 2 days. It has been very hot & dry here.⁴ It has not rained here enough to lay the dust since the middle of June which was before I went home for my vacation. I am sorry that Grace was homesick, I am afraid that she would not want to stay here long if she could not stay 2 weeks in Des Moines. I have one of my dissertations written & will have to write another by the 1st of October. All the wells around here are dry & and the spring from which they force the water for the supply at the college runs very low every day & there is danger of it giving out entirely. I would like very much to have Hattie come & see me. I think I will go to Des Moines

⁴ According to the official weather report, the summer months of 1886 broke all records for heat and drought. Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Report*, 1886 (Des Moines, 1887), 9-10.

& see Evert during the Fair. Have you had any rain in Jefferson since I left & How does everything seem to be doing.

I want to hear from you often. Love to All

Your Affectionate Son Geo

Ames Ia Aug 30 86

Dear Father

I have not heard from you for a number of days but had a letter from ma a few days ago. I would like to go to Des Moines next week if I can. Next Saturday I will have to pay up my board up to the 1st of Sept. I will have to pay only about \$4.00 now as I paid part of it before. If I go to Des Moines I will need some money besides but do not know how much as I do not know what the fare will be. I would like to know as soon as possible if I can go. I can not write more as it is bed-time Let me hear from you soon.

Geo.

Ames Sept 19, 86

Dear Father

I have not heard from you for over a week. I suppose ma, Grace & Floy got home all right. I had a very nice time in Des Moines & learned quite a number of things by going through the machine shops. There was a concert in the Chapel last night. The president took part in it. He plays on the flute & is a very good musician. I just got through making one of the best tools I ever made yet in the shop. I made & polished it up so that it looks just as good as a tool that one could buy. I like this terms work the best of any yet. How did the county fair get along this year. Has Floy gone back home yet? I supposed she had a good time & wish I had been home too. I don't think I can go home this term as I have so much to do. The term is a little over half gone & I guess I can stay the other half all right. Are you selling any virus for Hog Cholera now? Does Holton [?] of Carroll do very much with it yet? I am studying electricity now in Physics & will get through it in a week or so & after that I will study Astronomy the rest of the term. I will have to get a book which will cost \$2.35 & so I will need

that much as I paid my board room rent etc & have only about 75c. We are now having experiments of all kinds in electricity and as they have almost every kind of apparatus that they want to use it makes everything very nice. We will take up the subject of electric lighting in a few days & make experiments with lams dynamos etc. I will room in the main building next year as the room where I am now will be taken by a junior. Seniors have the rooms in the building which are much larger than the ones at the cottages. I want to hear from all often as possible. Love to All.

Your Loving Son Geo

Ames Oct 5th. 86.

Dear Father

I rec'd the basket you sent me, last night but have not heard from you since last Friday. As you said you would write Saturday I did not know but that the letter was miscarried if you had written. If you sent the Souvenir I did not receive it. I am getting along finely & am feeling well. The pies & cookies that ma sent taste like home. It is time for French so Love to All

Your Son Geo.

Ames Oct. 10th 86.

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter Friday night also one a few days before alright. Glad to hear you are still having good success with your Hog Cholera. Hattie Kit & Harry were here yesterday from 10 AM to 4 P.M. & looked around enough so that I guess they got a good idea of the College & how things were run. I was working in the shop when Hattie came and was about as greasy as could be & it took about ½ hour to clean up before I could go to find them as they were waiting in the chapel. I broke the crystal in my watch & will have to have it fixed as I feel almost lost without it now. I will need \$1.00 or so for my washing etc as I have had to get books & a few things that I needed & did not have enough to get washing done. The President preached today

in the Chapel. I guess Hattie can tell you all about everything when she gets home.

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

Ames Oct 24th '86.

Dear Father

I have not heard from home for quite a while I have been very busy the last week getting ready for examinations. I had one examination Friday & will have two more tomorrow. I think I will have 6 more examinations in Political Economy. The cottages will be lighted with electricity next Tuesday. The wires etc are all up now & they only have to connect them with the dynamo I suppose Hattie got home all right after her visit. How did she enjoy her visit at the College. I have selected a room in the College building for next year but in order to hold it I will have to make \$3.00 deposit before the 1st of Nov. Do you expect to have much sale for your virus this winter or does there not seem to be much sickness among the hogs. Is there any thing going on at home now? I would like to hear from you as often as possible. I will be home in a little over 2 weeks. I will probably stay till the end of the term. How does Ma feel now also yourself and how do the girls get along at school.

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son George

Ames Feb 27 1887.

Dear Father

I just started to write & the lights went out. Some part of the engine broke & put out the lights so that I have to use candles. The new professor in Latin etc preached today Prof Barrows from Cleveland O. He seems to be a very nice man & a good talker. Jo had no trouble in being classified and I think all of the girls from Jeff got their classification all right after Kendall wrote the 2nd time. We are having much better board than we had at the cottage. I have not been classified yet but will be tomorrow. They

were late in getting started on account of Gen Geddes.⁵ None were classified until Friday & those Freshmen. I have not seen the Prof in Mechanics yet so I can not tell exactly what I will have this term. I hear they will get in 2 or 3 new lathes in the shop this spring. There are some new instrument here now that we will use this spring in our work in mechanics. It is so dark I can hardly write—so Love to All.
Your Affectionate Son Geo.

Ames Mch 10 1887

Dear Father—

I rec'd your letter that evening was glad to hear from you. Capt Head was here for a short time this morning but I did not see him. I will work in the shop tomorrow afternoon. I think I will have all I can do this term. I have 15 hours per week recitation besides 6 hours drawing & 10 hours shop work. In the general course they only have from 15 to 18 hours per week so that I have much more. But the more I have the better I do it because if I do not have enough to keep my [me] busy all the time I don't get any of my lessons as well. Every thing seems to go as usual here. We are getting good board. I did not get the Souvenir last week so that I have not heard anything about Jefferson for a week. Has that fellow I sent some virus to written to you yet about it? Dr. Fairchild is a very good one to give lectures as he is very easily understood and talks in an easy manner. Does Hattie expect to come out to the college before she goes back home? If she does I want her to let me know so that I will have time to sweep out before she gets here. I will try & write to ma & the girls before long.

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

P. S. I rec'd the chamois skin a day or so ago & it was just the thing.

⁵ General James Lorraine Geddes, the first professor of military tactics and later college treasurer and land agent, had died Feb. 21, 1887. For his varied and valorous career, see Allen Johnson et als. eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1926-), VII, 205-206.

Ames Ia Mch 13, 1887

Dear Mother

I rec'd a letter from you a short time ago and was very glad to hear from you. I have just been to Chapel. Dr. Yeomans⁶ a member of the board of trustees preached. I worked in the shop yesterday and everything went all right. Pa gave me Everts address but I have lost it and as I would like to write to him I would like very much to have it. I would like to have Laura's address also. Most of my class are here now but there are still a number to come yet. Randall who is taking the same course as I am is not here yet so that I am the only one in the class in mechanics but I think he will be here some time this week. I have just been talking with Hattie over the telephone. She said that she would try & come out to the college in a day or so. If you want to talk with me about anything special you can do so by calling up the presidents or steward office here. I have commenced geology & like it very well. I will have to write 5 essays in psychology this spring besides the dissertation on Electric light machinery. So you can see I will have enough writing to do for 1 term. There are about 60 girls here now going to school which is more than they ever had before. We are getting much better "grub" than usual which is a very important fact. How does everything get along at home? When is Mary going to Des M-----. My room mate is here now so that I am not alone. Let me hear from you & the girls often.

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

Ames Mch 25 1887

Dear Father

I rec'd a letter from ma & a line from you last night. I have been out on our tour this afternoon. Prof

⁶ Samuel P. Yeomans was long a practicing physician in Iowa and surgeon in the Civil War. During the 1850's he served in the General Assembly and as register of the Sioux City land office. He was active in the G.A.R. and Pioneer Law Makers Association. At this time he was serving on the board of the College. *Annals of Iowa* (3rd Ser.) VI (1903), 235-236.

Osborn who teaches the Geology class took the class out to get stones of different kinds and we went out to a stone quarry about 2 miles north so that it was quite a nice walk as we had to climb a great many hills & go through the brush most of the way. The other member of the class in mechanics is here now so that we can work along together & makes it much nicer than going to class alone.

The faculty at their last meeting made the rule that all members of the Senior Class must hand in their subjects for Theses by the last Monday in March, & they expect us to gather together our facts from now till the end of the year & will have everything ready before the last of the fall term. I saw Prof Bassett & determined upon the subject of High Speed Engines. In addition to the Thesis I will have to make a complete set of drawings of the Engine. M. M. Head expected his father to come up on the bus tonight but was disappointed. I will have to pay my board in 1 week. In addition to the board for the first month I have to pay the room rent & hospital fee for the term. The whole will amt to about \$19.05 which includes the board for Feb. & Mch up to Apr 1. I wish you could send it if you can next week as Lincoln is very particular about paying up on time. I would also like about \$2.00 before that if you can send it as I need it. They charged me \$4.62 for my Thermo Dynamics which is a book of about 600 pages & very poorly bound. Last week I rec'd 2 copies of the Souvenir one you sent me & one sent directly from the office. Did you have them send it to me? It has my name printed upon it. You do not need to send the Bee as Joe takes it & he says I can read it just as well as to have it sent to me.

Let me hear from you often.

Love to All

Geo.

Ames Ia Apr 3 1887.

Dear Father

I rec'd a letter from you last Friday. Mr. Paxton said he was in the office yesterday & saw you & had quite a talk with you. I have not been feeling very well for the last few days as I have a bad cold & there seems to be a

swelling on the left side of my neck which makes my neck rather stiff. Last night I had a bad headache. My throat is some sore. If you think best you had better send me some medicine as I do not want to be down sick. I think it is due to a cold as the recitations rooms are not as warm as they should be some times. Dr. Welch has got back from his trip to California. He will take charge of his class in Psychology. Paxton said that you expected to be here at the college in about 2 weeks. Were you going to bring Mary along & go to Des Moines? I think we will have the largest class that ever graduated although I think we were the smallest class that ever entered. How are you all getting along at home? How is ma feeling now? Let me hear from you as soon as possible.

Your Son Geo.

Ames May 29th 87.

Dear Father

I rec'd a letter from you yesterday and was glad to hear from you. Two or three of the boys here went up to Boone to attend the masonic gathering. They said they saw you & Lou there. I am sorry you could not come down here. Capt Head⁷ was here Friday evening for a while and then went to Boone on a freight. I suppose you knew Head went home. Kit is going home today

The grass on the campus was nearly dead but it rained quite hard last night & it is beginning to start up again. The literary societies held a memorial session last night and there was some very fine speaking. There will be no Chapel here today but most of the students will go to Ames as they will have Services there. I have been working a great deal in the shop lately. I worked all day yesterday. We are having better instruction than ever before. The Prof works

⁷ Albert Head of Jefferson was lawyer, banker, and real estate promoter. In the Civil War he was an organizer, captain, and assistant adjutant general of Co. F 10th Iowa Infantry. He served four terms in the General Assembly and was speaker in 1886. His son Mahlon M. who is mentioned in the letters was three years younger than George, hence it is not surprising that he did not continue at the College. Later, in 1889, he entered Ohio Wesleyan University. E. B. Stillman, *Past and Present of Greene County, Iowa* (S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago, -1907), 631-633, 653-654.

in the shop more than he did at first of term & he is much better than the foreman.

The Prof has not said anything about going to Chicago except what we will have to do when we get there. He is giving us some special work in shop such as fitting etc. He will probably hear this week some time about it so that I will know for certain. Let me hear from [you] as often as possible. Love to All

Your Affectionate Son
Geo

Ames 9/25 87

Dear Father

I have not heard from you since I saw you last, but I suppose you are well. McCarty was in Jeff yesterday and said he saw you a cross the street. He also said that Hattie & Lou went to Carroll while he was there. Has the Railroad Co settled up with you yet? I am busy with my thesis all the time that I can get now so as to get it done. There are no news around here as everything is the same day after day. I have a good appetite & weigh 160 lbs with prospects of a few more pounds before the end of the term.

I ought to get a new pair of pants for every day wear as I have not a pair that are fit to wear except my best & I do not like to wear them now. so that if I can I would like to get a pair. I will need some money any way to pay for my washings etc.

Let me hear from you Love to All

Your Affectionate Son
Geo

Ames Sept 28 '87.

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter last night and was very glad to hear from you. I was very much surprised to learn that Mahoney was dead and there was so much sickness.

I seem to be rather hard up just at present in shape of clothes. I thought when I wrote you before that I would not need a pair of shoes right away but I find that I can not make mine last any longer and will have to get a new pair. I would

like to get them as soon as possible and then I guess I will be fixed in that line. My board becomes due one week from Saturday. It is \$12.25 and is the last I will have to pay. The Pres changed the time for Chapel from 5 PM to 7 P.M having it just before study hours. It makes it much better. It is time for the lights to go out so I must close

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo

Ames Oct 6th 87.

Dear Father

I rec'd a letter from you a few days ago. I have been very busy this week on my thesis. The faculty gave us this week to work on our theses so that we do not have to go to recitation. I am going to test the engines in the shop and electric light station this afternoon and evening. I am going to see Bassett about getting a job this winter. I think he can get me one by what he said last term. I will have to pay my board next Saturday \$12.25 I need some money besides that as there are a number of little things I will have to get. I would like \$3.00 if you can send it as I owe it to one of the boys and would like to pay him. I will send you programs of the graduating exercises when I get them. Love to All

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

Ames Oct 15 '87.

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter and also the draft for \$15.00 a few days ago and also one for \$10.00. I have been so very busy that I have neglected writing to you. The boiler in the shops here gave out last night so that we did not have any electric light last evening but had to use candles. I have my thesis and also my final thesis drawing done. The programs for commencement exercises are not yet done but when they are I will send you one so that you may know when to come. Prof Bassett said that he could do better about getting us a job by waiting till school is out and then when he is in Chicago, he thinks he could do much better than by writing.

I wish you would ask Lou what he thinks my chances are of getting into the C & N. W shops at Chicago as I believe I would as leave work in the railroad shops as any, if I can get a place.

Everything is going on as usual here. How did the R.R. settle up with you?

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son
Geo.

Ames Oct. 30 '87.

Dear Father:—

I rec'd a letter from you a short time ago but have not had time to write until now. I am glad to hear that the gas is holding out so well and it looks now as if the gas had come to stay. I would like very much to be at home to see what is going on as I suppose every body is excited. I am having examinations every day. I had one all Friday afternoon till 5-30 and worked all day yesterday in the shop and then commenced testing the electric light engine at 5-15 and did not get through til 11:30 so that you see I am pretty busy. I expect to take another test some day this week. School will be out one week from Wednesday and I will be glad of it. I will need some more money as the diploma will cost \$7.00 and there are some other expenses which will come in along at the end. The class day exercises come on Tuesday and the graduating exercises on Wednesday. I think I can get the invitations so as to send them in a day or so. Let me hear from you. I would like to know all the news about Gas.⁸

Love to All

Your Affectionate Son
Geo.

Ames Nov 3rd 87.

Dear Father

I rec'd your letter last evening. In regard to the exercises There will be nothing on Monday that would interest you as there is simply the board meeting etc. On Monday evening the President gives a reception to the graduating

⁸ Evidently one of the periodic oil boring booms in the state.

class. At 2 PM on Tuesday we have the Class exercises. These consist of orations poems valedictory etc from members of the class. The faculty have nothing to do with these as it is given entirely by the class. The graduating exercises proper come on Wed—at 10 AM. In these exercises 10 theses are read and the members of the class receive their diplomas. If you can come Monday evening at 5 PM and stay in Ames till the next morning and then stay at college all day and then stay in Ames Tuesday night and go back home Wed evening on the passenger I think that would be as good an arrangement as could be made. If you can not come to stay any length of time you had better come so as to be here Tuesday anyway. I would like to have Ma Hattie and the girls come Monday if possible. If you can let me know right away how many rooms you will want and on what nights I will secure them. But I ought to know as soon as possible. I have one more examination and then I will be done except learning my valedictory.⁹ Let me hear from you soon. Love to All.

Your Affectionate Son

Geo.

P.S. I sent an invitation to Mrs Rice. You can tell Mr Rice it was meant for him too.

I would like Floy's address as I would like to send her an invitation.

⁹ George's valedictory address was regarded as one of the high points of the class day exercises by the student paper. At commencement, as an honor student, he gave a summary of his graduation thesis on "High Speed Engines." *Aurora*, Commencement Number, Nov. 1887.

Massena

The new town of Massena, 14 miles west of here is being boomed right along, and thus far is ahead [of] Cumberland, the terminus of the road. There are now eight buildings erected and in process of erection. Prominent among these is the business house being put up by our fellow townsman B. A. Green, who will start a lumber yard at that place. In addition to Mr. Green's office, Charlie Baker will put a stock of groceries in the same building and Bailey & Fox will have their land office there also . . . *Fontanelle Observer*, January 15, 1885.

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