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A LETTER FROM CEDAR FALLS
*Edited by Thomas H. Smith**

The following letter was found in the false bottom of a wooden box among various antique articles in Bucyrus, Ohio, on December 29, 1956. It was the property of the descendants of the Wise family who were early settlers of Bucyrus. The writer of the letter, Adam Wise, was one of eight children of John George and Charlotte (Moore) Wise of Ohio. The letter was written to a brother, William, who was in the furniture business in Ohio. The Wise family is representative of the people who, with a limited education, migrated to the West seeking to improve their economic condition. Adam Wise's letter is here reproduced exactly as it was written, with the misspellings typical of the mid-nineteenth century Midwest.

Arriving in America in the mid-eighteenth century, the Wise family settled in Goshoppen, Pennsylvania. They were of German origin, the name being spelled Weise and changed to Wise in 1799. From Pennsylvania, descendants of the first Wises can be traced to Hagerstown, Maryland, where one of them served in the Maryland Militia during the Revolutionary War.¹ In 1782 the family continued westward, moving to a farm on Wisconsin Creek in Lyken Valley, Pennsylvania. The Wises established themselves in Bucyrus, Ohio, in 1835. Their children moved into Lake County, near Crown Point, Indiana, in 1849, and finally into Iowa during the next decade.

Cedar Falls, in Black Hawk County, had a population of some 2,200 at about the time this letter was written. Originally founded in 1845 as Sturgis Falls, the town changed its name to Cedar Falls in 1849. A grist mill, begun in 1848, contributed to the growth of the town, which was also the county seat until 1855, when Waterloo became the center of county gov-

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¹ Inscription on a tombstone in Millersburg, Pennsylvania: "Adam Weise. Now Wise. Born Dec. 23, 1751 in Phil. Co. Pa. Died Oct. 5, 1833 in Millersburg Pa. aged 81 yrs. 9 mos. 12 ds. Revolutionary soldier from Hagerstown, Md. From 1776 to Dec. 1780 in Co's of Capt's Bell, Fackler & Ott in Battalion Com'd by Col. John Stull. Commiss'd Ensign Nov. 21, 1780."

ernment.² This letter reflects the way of life in wartime in a rural Iowa community, its economic problems, and the tensions of the Civil War.

Cedarfalls December, 27th³

I Recieved your letter the 25th and Was glad to here from you I have writen to you & and [sic] never recieved an anser I thought you had goen in the army and now I will give you the histrey of this part of Iowa in the first plase I will tell you how I like it I like it better here then I did in indiani for the foling reson 1 it is helthy 2 thare is no swails and myer holes⁴ 3 clear water in the river that when a person wants afish take your speer and go and pic out a big one Put your speer in to him hal him out I have speered som that was so hevy that when I went to rais them in the boat that thay was so hevy that thay borke my speer handel and dropt in the water and went off with my speer I would like to go speering with you some night next spring 4 thare is plenty of money cash for evry thing; good slaying when the snow comes it lays til spring it is snowing like vengins now thare is no mud and rain all winter here allways good roads I must stop riting for the old woman [Adam's wife, Ann] an children comens to crack hasel & wallnuts all the opgecion [sic. opposition] I have to this contry is the long winter and cold wether 5 month feating [sic. ?]

Now for the prise of produse wheat 80 (40;50) corn 60 (15;20) potatos 50 (15 to 20) oats 50 (10) the crops faild last year what makes them so dear this winter the [word evidently omitted] was good I put the prise of other years under this year so you can se when thare is good crops what the prise was [Prices he had inserted under present prices are here added in parentheses.] pork 5 to 6 pr hundred coffee 35 to 40 tea \$140c to 175 sugar 12-18 drid appels 10 cent gren appels 150 per bushel Butter 10 to 20 egg 5 to 25 we have no egg to sel now what makes them so dear now

² John C. Hartman (ed.), *History of Black Hawk County, Iowa . . .* (2 vols., Chicago, 1915), 219, 273-5; *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census, 1836-1880* (Des Moines, 1883), 433.

³ Year undetermined, believed to be 1864 or 1865.

⁴ Swales and mire holes are slight depressions in a prairie, usually marshy and rank with vegetation.

the prise of furniture comen tabel blackwalnut 5 dollars comen bedsted such as you sold for 3 cost here 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ 7 to tel the truth of it such furniture as thay have here you could not sel thare atall the prise of lumber I do not know for I did not think to inquire but I think walnut lumber is 20 dol baswood & oak & Butter nut is 12 to 15 hard maple about the same thare is all kind of timber here except yelow poplar & sycamore & beech if you want to come out this winter and See for I think if you was out here you could git along fine for it would be a good plase for your traid if you come out here with 12 or 15 hundred you can buy a small farm and house and lot in town and you can work at your traid and I could work your farm for I would reather be on a farme then be in the plase I am now I am clerkin in a hole-sall and retall grocroy store not saloon as thay cald grocroy in Ohio

you want to know about John Wises & Borders⁵ John was down her[e] 2 weeks gon and stayed all nite thay was all well Border was here night before last and their was all well except Samuel he has the comsontion and thay give him up the old man did not no whether he would be alife til he got bachome he is nothing but skin and boon he sais John Boys are all in the army except John; Sam he is ded he died in the army marton is sick in the hospitel for along time John talks of goon to fech him home I do not no whare ben is the last we herd from him he was down helping grant kiling rebels gorges 2 boys ar in the army and I wold be thare to if thay would took me you know what ails me I am in the fix fatter was but I can help to kil dam copper heds here I belong to the home gards here thare is some copper hed here but they dasent speek or grunt thay dasent read thare papers in the streets here if thay have a meting thay must kep it stil for if we find it out thay git routet in a hurry when thay go to the post-ofice and git a paper thay must not hold it out long but put it in thare pockit and go home and read it if thay open it in public it is tore in peces

I most for got to tel you that we are all well for we never much sick som bely ake and toos ake the boys cuts thare toes and fingers and girls burn their fingers and baby cry for to be on the big rocen chair and hold lisa dol and the fire is al did out and ann is gen to bed and I mus go to for so I can git up arly Ann wants to no whether you hav al girls nane

⁵ John Wise was a brother of Adam and William Wise. "Border" may have been the husband of one of the Wise sisters.

mata [sic. ?] or what all thar nanes are so good Night rite sune do not
for git Adam Wise Cedarfals Iowa

Viola Evoline is asleep she wants to send a feu lines to you[r] girl but
never mind I wil rite what she wants to say She read in the 5 redar rites
sifers & gogrefy

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