

DOCUMENTS

LETTERS FROM TAYLOR COUNTY, 1868-1880

Edited by MILDRED THRONE

Economic and social conditions in southwestern Iowa between 1868 and 1880 are portrayed in the following letters from Austin S. Houck¹ and other Iowans to Stephen H. Griffith, a Somerset County, Pennsylvania, farmer. Griffith had formed a friendship with Houck during a brief residence in the Middle West before 1860. The Pennsylvanian owned the northeast quarter of section 12, township 69, range 34, in Taylor County for over twenty years, and several of the letters deal with payment of taxes on his land and with his plans for the sale of the property.

Although the letters are scattered over a period of twelve years, they do point out certain facts about land and price conditions which should be of interest to the economic historian. It has unfortunately been impossible to track down other contemporary references to the swindling and absconding real estate agents (see letter of August 8, 1876) or to the fraudulent mortgages credited to the agents of the Scotland Trust and Loan Company (see letters of September 16 and 23, 1880).

The letters contain other economic information of interest and value. For instance, the increase in Griffith's taxes

¹ Austin S. Houck, born in New York in 1832, emigrated to Taylor County in 1856. A carpenter, he is credited with building the first frame house in Bedford, the county seat. In 1860 he went to the Pike's Peak region in search of gold, staying in that area for about 2½ years. Returning to Bedford, he enlisted in Co. B, Ninth Iowa Cavalry, in 1863, in which company he served as commissary sergeant until 1865, when he was discharged for disability. Following the war he entered the farm implement business with his brother Edwin. *History of Taylor County, Iowa* . . . (Des Moines, 1881), 532-3, 647-8.

on his quarter section, from \$6.62 in 1861 to \$26.84 "with 9 per cent interest" in 1876 indicates the rapid rise in property values as the new county was settled and improved. Statistics on prices and wages, given in the letter of November 24, 1868 (or 1869), and references to the building of the railroads in and around Taylor County give additional information on the economic growth of this section of southwestern Iowa.

A letter from Austin Houck, written to his brother and sister from Colorado in 1860, was published in the Bedford newspaper. This letter has been added to the collection.

The letters were submitted to *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS* by Dr. Carrol H. Quenzel, librarian and professor of history at Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia. They are the property of Stephen H. Griffith's grandson, Dr. William Wayne Griffith, assistant professor of English at Mary Washington College. Dr. Griffith has graciously consented to their publication.

Bedford Iowa Mar 23rd / 1860

Friend Griffith

Dear Sir — I am happy to inform you of the safe arrival of your draft last night and found it all right. I accordingly paid your tax and remit the receipts to you² I began to feel afraid that there was something wrong again as it did not come as soon quite as I looked for, but this time it is all safe.

There is 26 cts over the amt. you will perceive which I except [accept] as Post mony but nothing farther. I expect to take a trip to the rocky mountains in a few days to try my luck at gold hunting and presuming you would occasionally like to hear from that region I will write accordingly. Two weeks ago yesterday I attended a wedding party at

² Houck and others handled the payments of taxes on Griffith's holdings in Taylor County.

Mr Nashes in this place, also last night at the homestead. There was two couple marriade at the same time. The first couple was Wesley Underwood to Miss Nancy Nash the other two couple was, G. W. Cummins to Miss Perkins and Wm Michael to Miss Perkins There is a grand infair this after noon and of cource I shal be needed to keepe the par[t]ies straight Old bachelors make excellent moderators but I expect I am not fully entitled to full membership yet a while We had a grand time at each of these weddings The Bedford Calthumpean band was out side for the space of 3 or 4 hours making more nois than would take to dround the artilery of heaven. This disgraceful practice is prevalent through this state and Missouri and sometimes to a very greate extent. Respecting my future prospects my intention and intended I have but a word to say, my intention as I before sed is tourds Piks peak. My prospect is that of other gold hunters. My intended as yet is a shadow without a substance or reality and only lives in immagination I have the faults of other men of my age, looking for supreme perfection which my own better judgment tels me can never be satisfide or found, which on the other hand would uterly disqualefy me as a companion.

The noble wish of your generous Leady to hear that I am living in the rich fulness of womans love, at some future period it may be my happy lot to gratefy The winter & spring is very mild and pleasent. There has not been a drop of rain or flake of snow for over 5 weeks and the most of the time clear and warm. but some wind now and then. I had almost forgot to tel you that I am well as usual. I believe I have not eny thin to write further of interest.

As ever your Friend & Servent.

To S. H Griffith

From

A. S. Houck

[Bedford *Taylor County Tribune*, September 13, 1860]

COMMUNICATED

SPARISH [*sic*] BAR R. K. B. Mts.,³
S. CLEAR CREEK K. T.⁴ July, 24, 1860.

DEAR BROTHER & SISTER: —

The time has come when the blaze of excitement has passed away, and extravagant hopes, and useless fears are superseded by fixed realities, which three months experience have demonstrated to me to be true. And presuming that I am now as capable of writing the truth as I shall be (though partially incapable as well as others to do so) I will, to the best of my ability, strive to perform my task. I am aware that news from this section respecting the Mines and their general development is already stale, and uninteresting, and varying according to the luck of its expositor.

I could give you my own experience in mining, but no man's personal experience is a correct miniature of the mining interest as a whole.

The mines may be described under four general heads viz; Gulch, Bar, Patch or Dry digging, and Quarts leads. The Gulch claims, as a general thing, require from 6 to 20 feet of stripping to get to the pay dirt, and many times it is impossible to get down to the bed on account of water. I believe as a general thing they do not pay the expenses of opening them, yet there are exceptions, some pay very well. A Dutchman who had just returned from the Big Blue, replied to my interrogations respecting the mines as follows: "Von claim pay tam goot, ten claim pay no pay at all." — This answer in my opinion will apply to the entire Gulch,

³ Appreciation is due to LeRoy R. Hafen, executive director of the State Historical Society of Colorado, for the following interpretation of this heading: Spanish Bar was on South Clear Creek near the present site of Idaho Springs, some thirty-five miles west of Denver. "R. K. B. Mts." very probably is a misprint for "R. K. Y. Mts." — or Rocky Mountains.

⁴ Kansas Territory. Colorado did not achieve territorial status until 1861.

Bar, and Patch diggings. From the best information I can gain respecting Quarts mining, it is the only safe business a man can engage in here in the shape of mining and even in this, great care is necessary in selecting a locality, and a heavy capital required to start with. It is a true saying that it takes a mine to work a mine.

The necessary expenses in opening a claim before you can realize wages, will cost from \$100 to a \$1,000, and all from first to last is uncertainly [*sic*]. You may strike the pay streak, but the chances are ten to one against you.

There is a wild and reckless speculation going on here among the miners.— A claim that is opened and prospects well will sell for more in promissory notes than there is in it. The game is, get enough down to warrent a sale and as much more on time as possible. It is my honest opinion that there is more money expended in buying and opening claims, than will ever be taken out.

From the best information I can get, we have the best claims in this district, (at least they pay better than any others) I know of. We have two hired hands, and six of us in Co. Here is the amounts as we take it out: July 10th \$11,41; 12th, \$17,50; 13th, \$17,82; 14th, \$30,45; 16th, \$8,55; 18th, \$28,60; 19th, \$25,45; 20th, \$24,79; 21st, \$12,75; 23d, \$33,00. Our hired help costs us three dollars a day to the hand. Board is worth one dollar a day to the hand.— The cost of tools, Sluices, &c., are not very great, but still it counts. Our claims cost \$1,080, they are good for cost when ever we wish to dispose of them. Now these are the facts in our case. When you have summed it up you will know all that I know about our prospects. We hope and expect to do better, but there is no positive proof that we shall. We spent about six weeks with five of our Co., in opening our claims. Of course we made nothing until we got to pay dirt.

You doubtles hear exciting stories of men taking out

from five to one hundred dollars a day. These stories are generally based upon facts, but there are other facts connected with them, which materially change their character. For instance, a man works fifty days for which he gets nothing, and on the fiftyfirst day he takes out \$80 or \$100, and this last item is published all over the land, nothing is said of the fifty days for which he received nothing.

Perhaps I have underrated the mines, and when we take into consideration the fact that nearly all who come here are green in the business, and that this is their first attempt to collect Gold, I feel more confident that we shall yet do something in the way of making money. We have now had three months experience, and I regard it as quite an item.

I have not been able to do any hard work for about a month. I am now able to cook for the rest of the boys. My ill-health was doubtless caused by change of climate and exposure. All the rest of our boys are in good health, fine spirits, and sanguine in their hopes of success. As for myself I am glad I came here, for it will pay me in more ways than one.— The variety of scenery; the strange contrast between our broad prairies of Iowa, the monotonous scenery of the Plains, and these lofty mountain ranges piled one above another, until they reach the regions of perpetual snow, amply pay me for my journey; and I love to wander up these deep mountain gorges and gaze upon the projecting cliffs far above me, and listen to the roar of these mountain torrents as they leap from their ice-bound regions above, chiming in their base with Nature's great anthem which the winds are constantly playing in the tops of these lofty pines which overshadow us. But my letter has already grown too lengthy, I must therefore close for the present.

AUSTIN S. HOUCK.

Bedford Iowa Feb 14th 1861

Mr Stephen. H. Griffith

Dear Sir

to day Mr. Edwin Houcke⁵ showed me a letter from you to Austin Houck in which you speak of your Taxes in this county, and as Austin is in the Pikes, Peak, Gold Mines, and, as we are engaged in the tax paying business he requested me to write to you about the same. Amt of Tax for 1860 on

N E	12 — 69 — 34	\$ 5.52
	Interest Say	10
	fee	1 00

State Bank of Ohio or Ind, \$ 6 62
or Draft on New York or any par funds on Banks in *free States* no Tory seceding treason fostering paper rec'd I wrote to you some time ago informing you of Am't but probably you did not get my letter

Very Respectfully yours

Jesse Evans⁶*Register letter*Bedford Iowa May 22nd AD 1862

Mr Stephen H Griffith

Dear Sir

Yours

of April 28th is received and contents noted, and in answer I will say that to pay all taxes, both State County school &

⁵ Edwin Houck, born in New York in 1820, was an older brother of Austin. He emigrated to Taylor County in 1854 and is credited with having built the second house on the site of Bedford. He also established the first printing press in the county and later opened a farm implement agency. *History of Taylor County . . .*, 647.

⁶ Jesse Evans, born 1844, came to Taylor County in 1856 with his parents. He was a merchant and grocer in Bedford in the 1880's, *ibid.*, 641.

Federal it will take Seven Dollars and 45 cents including 50 cents for my fee send Draft on New York or Ohio Indiana or Iowa Currency will answer if it is more convenient than a Draft if it runs another month it will be about 15 cts more

Yours truly

Danl Underwood

Treasurer of
Taylor Co
Iowa

P S Austin Houck is gone to Pikes Peak

D U

LAW AND REAL ESTATE OFFICE
OF
MOORE & KINSELL.

Bedford, Taylor Co., Iowa, Sept 7 1867

S H Griffith Esq

Dear sir

Yours of the 14 of Aug. has been received and contents noted

I do not think your land can be sold for \$6.00 an acre or any thing near that amount. Any amount of wild land can be bought in this County for from \$1.50 to \$3.00 an acre⁷ I would advise you to hold on a few years as we have a good prospect for a R. R.

Austin is still living here He is married. The population of Bedford is about 500. The Co is improving slowly

Truly yours &C

Edwin Houck

⁷ According to the *Iowa Agricultural Report, 1867*, 479, improved land in Taylor County was selling for \$13 to \$30 an acre, while unimproved land could be bought for \$2.50 to \$7.00 per acre.

Office of E. T. Smith
Real Estate Agt.
Bedford Taylor Co.
Iowa Sept 16th 1868

Stephen H Griffith Esq

Dr Sir

There is a man by the name of Topping wants to buy the N E quarter of Sec. 12 Township 69 — Range 34 — and offers us \$3.00 per Acre — About the average of lands selling in this County — in like situation —

If you wish to sell to him at that price & will make out the deed & forward to us we will send you the amt. Either by Dft or by Express —

As we have been selling a good many pieces of land in this Co. we prefer sending by Dft. but pe[r]haps Express would be best for You as you live in a distant State —

Very Truly

E. T. Smith⁸

Our Commission 5% —

Office E. T. Smith
Land Agt.
Bedford Iowa Nov 7/68

Mr. S. H. Griffith
Jennerstown Pa:

Dr. Sir

Mr. C. L. Cuppy authorizes us to say to you that he will *take* the N. E. Qr. Sec. 12.— 69 — 34 at your price as per your letter \$5.00 per acre or \$800.— for the piece if Provided you will give him *Eight* months to pay the half of it. He paying *half cash down* — Mr. C. will secure the payment of the last half by note at 10% int & mort-

⁸ See letter of Aug. 8, 1876, for a further reference to E. T. Smith.

gage on the Land — Mr. C has the money for last half — due him from parties in Ohio — & due 15th July next.— He wishes to make a trip to Ohio in Spring of 1869 — & that is the reason he asks 8 mos. time on part — We can “*vouch*” for Mr. C He will pay it promptly when due — Mr. C. agrees to pay us our fees in the sale of the land & you will be at no expense from it whatever except sending the money to you — Please state how you wish it sent if you should accept the above as we presume you will We think it a good sale — We sold 80 acres today as good as your piece at \$3.00 per [acre] cash & have got more at same price —

If you conclude to sell to Mr. C. please send us a waranty deed in name of *C. L. Cuppy* — We can send you money by Dft —

Hopeing to hear from you soon we remain Yours truly

E. T. Smith
Clerk, Dist. Court

Blue Grove Farm Taylor
Co Iowa Dec 3^d 1868

S H Griffith Esq

Dear sir

Yours of the 20th inst is before me. In answer to your Inquiries I will say that good prairie located as favorably as yours is, is now selling at about \$5.00 pr acre Bedford is improving quite fast About 1000 hands are at work on the R. R. below⁹— expect to have the cars running to Bedford next season. I am engaged in farming, 16 miles North of Bedford A large force is at work on

⁹ This probably refers to a branch line of the Missouri Valley Railroad Co. being built from Savannah to Maryville, Mo.; completed to Maryville in November of 1869. W. W. Baldwin, *Corporate History of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company and Affiliated Companies* . . . (n. p., n. d. [1922]), map facing 233, 240. This line was deeded to the C. B. & Q., January 1, 1901, *ibid.*, 252.

the B & M R R about 10 miles N of my farm¹⁰ Excuse the brevity of this letter I am in a hurry

Yours Truly

Edwin Houck

Bedford Iowa Nov 24th 68[?] ¹¹

Mr. Stephen H Griffith, esq

Johnstown Pa —

Dear Sir

Your favor of Nov the 10th came to hand the 20th of this month and at this my earliest convenience I will endeavor to respond to it.

1st the season as the entire year has been very unfavorable for crops and the tillage of the ground and for verious other improvements The year has been wet and cold compared with other seasons here, yet peace and plenty are ours and we feel that a better day is dawning for us. Money is quite plenty here and the following is the market prises so far as I know of farm produce

Wheat	\$1.00 bu	-----
Corn	.50 cts do	Livewate \$7½ cwt
Oats	.35 cts do	Flour \$4 cwt
Potatoes	.20 cts do	Beef 7 to 10 cwt
Beans	5.00 do	Wood pr-cd- \$5

Stock hogs about 6 cts pr lb good cows \$50 — ordinary cows \$35 Horses medium \$125, Spring calves about \$12 pr head Oxen pr yoke average about 125 dollars Native lum-

¹⁰ The Burlington & Missouri River Railroad, part of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy RR. system. The main line of the B. & M. RR. was completed from Burlington to the Missouri River in 1869. Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West . . .* (Cambridge, 1941), 230-31.

¹¹ This letter was probably written in 1869, not 1868, because of following: mention of completion of the B. & M. R. RR. (not finished until 1869, see note 9); mention of death of wife which occurred in 1869, according to information in *History of Taylor Co. . . .*, 648; 1868 was a year of grasshoppers and drought, while 1869 was a year of wet weather, *Iowa Agric. Report, 1868*, 325,

ber pr thousand about \$25,— Pine according to lot or quality averags from \$22 50/100 up to \$65 per thousand here. Good farmes close to Bedford is worth from 25 to 50 dolors per acre according to improvements Prairie land unimproved within 5 miles of this Place that is good is worth \$10 pr acre and selling at that No land in the county is worth less than \$5 to 8 here now

Bedford is growing very rapidly and would grow much faster if we could get carpenters and masons enough We hav about 600 inhavitence now, a courthouse three good churches already built and the fourth will soon be built. We hav one of the best schoolhouses in southern Iowa with 4 departments a graded school, the house cost us about \$12,000. We hav a good flouring mill here and two saw mills. We have 1 furniture store 2 drug stores 3 grocery stores and nine drigoods houses and 3 black smith shops, one aggrcultural firm 1 waggen shop — an juell [jewelry store?] and news depot two good taverns We hav no lack of the clerical — legal or medical faculties here [and] R. R roads. The Burlington and Mo river R R is finished acrost the state it runs North of Bedford 20 miles. The Mo Valley R R — is now finished up to merysville¹² and the cares ran in yesterday They hav the survay and grade stakes up to Bedford and are now at work betwen here and merrysville the next county seat south of here They expect to complete the road to this place next season¹³

As you may not know eny thing of this road I will say that there is a line of road running from Galveston Texas to St Paul. minesota on the north

426-7, 431, 437; *ibid.*, 1869, 6-7; and mention of completion of Missouri Valley Railroad — which was completed in 1869, according to Baldwin, *Corporate History of C. B. & Q. . . .*, map facing 233.

¹² Maryville, Missouri. See note 9.

¹³ This line was extended from Maryville to the state line during 1870 by the Kansas City, St. Joseph & Council Bluffs Railroad Co., Baldwin, *Corporate History of the C. B. & Q. . . .*, 250.

This road comes by the way of Ft Scott Kansas Leavenworth St Joseph Mo. Bedford Iowa Ft Des-moins the capital of this state and to the great Pineries of Minnesota and Wisconsin A large portion of the road has been built and the[y] are now vigerously at work connecting verious points in the line. The State line R. R.¹⁴ is progressing slowly from the east and we expect a junction at this place in time There is plenty of chances to get good Bargains for farmes here and I think you can get one to suit you near town if you want to do so.

Common labour is worth about \$20 per month, daily labor is worth here in town \$1.50 Carpenters get about \$3. I could furnish 20 good carpenters work all the time here except cold wether. many jobs are laid over for want of help to complete them so you see times are lively here. School teachers get about \$45 to \$50 per month here, and more wanted I hav answered the questions you desired to know by simply stating facts so far as I hav a knowledg of the same I will further state in refference to our North and South R. R. that the engineers are here now setting the grade stakes They leave here tomorrow to complete the work of survey on the rout toards Des Moines I will now give you a short history of my life since you left here. The Spring of 60 I went to the Gold mines of Colorado — Staid there 2½ years. I acquired considerable propperty there I then returned to Iowa and enterd the army and staid or soldiered 2 years more — come off by a close rub for my life. I returned to Iowa after the war close and marriad a Girl by the name of Anjaline J Hunnel, of Wisconsin. she lived

¹⁴ Evidently a reference to the Iowa and Missouri State Line Railroad Company, a road projected from the Mississippi, south of Fort Madison, across the southern tier of Iowa counties, to the Missouri River. This road was never built, but surveys were made, prior to February of 1870. After several incorporations with other roads, the company became part of the C. B. & Q. system in 1901. Baldwin, *Corporate History of the C. B. & Q.* . . . , 179ff.

onely about thirty months and I was cald to pass through the sadest event of eny mans life. my parting with, who above all others I most tenderly loved. This broke down my health and caused such mental suffe[r]ing that I could not labour or rouse for nearly six months. I am alone in the world with onely one little Boy that I can love and call my own. I Bought five acres of land here in town built a good house and made a good home that we might hav the comforts of life as time passed on but alas for me my house is the preasent home of a stranger and my Boy is with his aunt and I but a boarder at the hotel agene. I hav made some money since you were here I lost about \$15000.00 during the war or I fear it is lost some think I can get it yet.

You say you hav a Wife and four littl ones. God bless you and yours. You hav the elements of true happiness a treasure for the heart and soul. May long life be granted to you and yours and may you long enjoy their love without tasteing of the cup I hav drunk

If I can be of eny survic to you here after I will be glad to aid my old Friend Write when you can and I will let you know eny facts you may desire to know

Yours truly

A. S. Houck

Excuse my meny mistakes

[fragmentary — evidently to Stephen H. Griffith, Esq.]
 . . . eny bisness you desire free of eny charge and transmit your receipts for taxes & when paid. I will get the Amt of taxes this year let you know when due and you send the amount. Bedford is alive with land agents who charge for all such bisness a large per ct. I hope I may be of some survice to you in this respect and will be glad to do so much for a Friend. I Expect to visit Pen. this winter and hav

about made up my mind to come and see you and spend a few days in Johnstown and vicinity I am Single yet and can come as well as not. I hav been intencely lonesome since Anny died and perhaps the excitement of travel and the re-union of Old friends at home may do me good

I hav a nice home here 5 acres in the center of Bedford for a residence a good house as is in the town but it is lonesome for me there now. You Say you hav a good Secret for me but cannot trust it to paper now Well we always hope for something to come to us that is good. I will hope and try to merit that which will bring happiness and contentment to me, and will appreciate eny revelation of good you may hav in store for me

Hoping to hear from you Soon I will close.

My respects to your

Wife & family

Yours Truly

A. S. Houck

Direct as usual to Bedford

Bedford Jan 19th 72

S. Griffith

Dear Sir I have your favour of Dec 17th but hav delaid answering it until the prent [present] as I hav been quite bizy in the Country finishing up som jobs of work. I was glad to hear from you as ever and always feel that I hav a treat when your letters comes Today I am not very well as I hav a severe cold and obliged to lay by from work. I hav been to the treasurers Office and find your tax on your 160 acres of land to be \$23.32 Our tax here is high but our prospects are good. We hav the North and South R R now compleete and doing a good bisnys.¹⁵ there was 13 car load

¹⁵ Probably a reference to the Creston Branch of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Company. Starting at Creston, on the main east-west line of the

of fat cattle and hogs went out for Chigago yestaday and the agent says there is from one to 13 almost dayly for the past few weeks. We expect to get the East and west R R which is being built through the sothern teer of Co which will give us the advantage of two rival Co. There will be no charge for paying you[r] tax as it is no trouble to me — living within a few rods of the cort house. Your land is within 6 miles of the R R and is probably worth at preasent \$8 per acre When I send you your tax receipts I will write you a long letter but I hope you will excuse me for preasent as I am in a very poor condition to write an interesting letter Money is quite hard to collect here at preasent as evry thing is low in price

I hav almost forgotten to tell you the name of my Boy We gave him the name — Austin Irving He is well and as fat as his picture represents. Pro- [Professor] Aiton and his wife are living in my house and I board with them and am concidered as one of the family He is principle of the ecadamy here. The Pro- expects to build in the Spring so I hav but of two choices I suppose viz to get an othe [another] family to come and take care of my propperty here or get a wife, and liv at home and tak care of it myself But I must See the East before I settle agane in life I cannot say when I will come, because my money matters are hard to control without closing some mortgages that I do not like to, at preasent.

Give my respects to family and hoping this will find you and yours well and in all the enjoyment of lifes choicest blessings I will close for the preasent —

Yours Truly

A. S. Houck,

Burlington and Missouri, the road was built south to a junction with the Kansas City, St. Joseph and Council Bluffs Railroad Company branch at the Iowa-Missouri state line, between August, 1871, and January, 1872. In 1875 the Creston branch became a part of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy system. Baldwin, *Corporate History of the C. B. & Q.* . . ., 153-4.

Bedford Iowa Sep 25th 1872

To Stephen H Griffith

Dear Sir

Your of Sep 17th is received and in reply I will say that Mr Erbe the man that was talking of bu[y]ing your land, left for Wisconsin shortly after I wrote you in July. He directed me to get your best terms and write him on the receipt of your letter which I did, but hav got no answer yet. I think he concluded he could not buy at the price and droped the matter. I will write him and lay before him your last terms and will let you know [when] I hear from him/

The mens names that live in the same Sec is Daniel Hamlim-¹⁶ and John Rutledge¹⁷ They are bothe well to do Farmers and very good men. Hamlim would hav a very good chance to sell it if he does not buy it himself as he lives joining. and is a prominent man in the Co. and a very honorable one. I will continue my efforts also, and when we get offers we can submit them to you.

Money is very scarce here and hard to collect this fall Corn is 16 cts Oats 7 cts Wheat 8 cts Potatoes 25 cts and all other grains in the same ratio I hav had a little bad luck myself in loaning money but hope to get it sometime. it was onely \$300, but it was evry dollar I had on hand and it hurt, for the preasent

I would recommend Daniel Hamlim as a good man to confer with in refference to your qr-Sec- as his farm joins on the south, and he is a good buisness man, and I will also refer all wanting to puchaes to your $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec that I see.

Your Truly

A. S Houck

¹⁶ Probably D. W. Hamblin, "farmer and stock-raiser, section twelve," *History of Taylor County . . .*, 814-15.

¹⁷ "Farmer and stock raiser, section 12 . . .," *ibid.*, 823.

(PS) I will take a little of the unfermented juice of those apples with you, But as I hold high posish in the I O of the G. T.¹⁸ I cannot drink Sidar or Wine you know.

Bedford Iowa Jan 7th 1873

Stephen H Griffith

Dear Sir

Your favor of Dec 27th is at hand and check for \$26 22/100 also rec- Enclosed I send you receipt of the Co Treasurer for taxes on your qur-Sec-. Ware there ever such a Cold winter here and such hard times as these in this County is the inquiry of all our recent Setlers here. We say No The Thermometor ranges from zero to 29 degrees below and has Seldom been above friezing point since the 1st Dec It is more mild today Times are very hard here There is no money to be had and we are litteraly ded so far as bisness is concerned. Corn is worth onely 12 cts delivered at the depo in Bedford Poark \$2.80 cts per cwt. Potatoes 15 cts, before it froze up, in the fall. Oats is onely 7 cts delivered. Thousands of people are burning their Corn for fuel, at preasent. The Epizot [Epizooty] among horses has become almost universal but many use them, acording to their necessities, as it is quite light in most cases, a few hav died here in town. I did expect to visit you this last fall and collected my money for that very purpose in August last. A man here who had bought a farm and had a mortgage to pay wanted to borrow the money for a few days and I let him hav it on conditions that he would get it when I called for it. I hav called but my calls are not successful yet To secure myself I hav been forced to take a property here in town that leaves me in debt and no money. I was in hopes I

¹⁸ Independent Order of the Good Templars, a temperance society. See Jacob A. Swisher, "Good Templars in Iowa," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, XLV (July, 1947), 235-60.

could get out of the matter and save the money for a pleasure trip but I hav failed, and my circumstences compell me to abandon it, for a while at least. There is no such thing as Selling propperty here at eny price for Cash, at preasent. There is no money in the Country and all we can do is to be contented until the East can buy our surpluss grain & stock I Should like to hav the priviledge of Spending the winter with you and the rest of my friends East. But fortune orderd otherwise even against my most ardent desire.

Yours Truly
A. S. Houck

Bedford, Iowa Aug 8th, 1876

Stephen H Griffith Esq
Johnstown Pa

Dear Sir

Your favor of July 26th to hand and recd with pleasure. It findes me well but the hard times and the great Scearcity of money in the west makes me as well as all other men in business feel uneasy about our collections, and the concequence that follow. Our Wheat & Oat & Barley Crops are almost an entire failure Wrye and winter wheat in some instances are an average crop Corn looks well for a fair crop yet, but hundreds of hogs are diing with diseas and the outlook is not flattering. We hav credited out a large amount of goods for us concidering our capital and Bought on time and to collect enough these hard times to meet our own paper is the point. The Taxes on your $\frac{1}{4}$ section is \$26 $\frac{84}{100}$ with 9 per cent interest. you had better pay before October 1st as there would be additional cost in advertising tax list as delinquent. You hav paid a good deal of tax on that land but it will come back to you with good interest and principle Some time There is not over 3 or 4 quarter sections in the township but what has been

taken by actual settlers and land will be scarce in two years more. As regard Agents I will say that, E. T. Smith, & O. B. Willson, have left for Mexico with the proceeds of their commission land sales. about \$100,000 in the arrears. it is pretty well for you that you did not have anything to do with them for they would have swindled you out of the money if they could. They got up the biggest swindle ever perpetrated in this part of Iowa that I know of. As to E. Johns, W. F. Evens and F. E. Walker they are a new firm that has gone into business lately. As men they stand fair. But they will expect to make a good commission out of the matter. If the land was mine I would hold it until times change and money gets more plenty. This country has improved very fast in the last 3 years. It is no longer a wild prairie but in every direction you see farms, groves and fields and there is an abundance of the very best of fruit in the county. Bedford now has about 2000 inhabitants.—

Bedford, Iowa, May 5th, 1878

Stephen H Griffith
Johnstown Pa

Dear Friend

Your letter of the 25 of April came to hand this morning and I have just taken your receipt of taxes on your $\frac{1}{4}$ section from the Treasurer R. C. King. The letter was a little longer coming than usual, consequently too late to save the one per cent. The land is worth \$12 per acre and I believe some one will purchase it before fall. It is now surrounded by good improved farms. I will talk the matter to all land buyers that comes along that I see. I have notified the farmers around the neighborhood that the land was for sale and refer any one that wanted to buy a farm to me.

Yours Truly

A. S. Houck

Bedford Iowa January 5th 1880

Stephen. H. Griffith
Johnstown Pa

Dear Sir

I See by the St Louis Commercial reporter that there is large quantities of Steel fence Wire Manufactured at your town. As the West especialy this State is largely fenced with wire the demand is heavy, and I write you to assertan the Whole Sale price by car load and to see if an arrangement could not be made to send Wire this way and corn back to the works. thus making use of Cars boath ways The Company Could get special rates for cars and we handle at this end of the rout. Sell to dealers in good-commercial Standing as well as retail, at our own house. I could be in readiness to load a car with corn or such other farm products as most desirable.

Corn is worth today, 23, cts

Wheat " " No 2 " , 90

Oats " " , 20

Potatoes , 40.

Other produce of the farm are in simpathy with these Prices It does seam to me that an arrangement of this kind ought to win by good management There would be a cash bal- to the Co. as return cares would not square act. [account]

Money is getting plenty and buisness good. Let me hear from you

Yours Truly

A. S. Houck

for

E. Houck

Bedford Iowa 1/19th 1880

S. H. G
Johnstown

Dear Sir your letter has been received and read with pleasure. I am sorry to hear of ravages of diseases in your midst There is no diseases or feavors in our midst at present — universal health prevails. Well let me give you a discription of a day in Bedford — Say Saturday the 17th for instance. The day is clear and warm and the air is full of honey bees and other insicts all out on a general frolic It is 9, o clock and in evry directon you could see up here farmers coming to town with their teams loaded with corn and wood and some hay. Corn is principle commodity. By 10 Oc evry streat and ally is full and more coming, by 12 Oc they estimate there is 500 load I made some inquiry this morning to get at the amount of corn received by the dealers in Bedfor[d] and compiled their figures, and, find that there was 13000, bushels came to town during the day. There is more corn and grain in Taylor Co. than ever before Prices fair — and Farmers are more hopeful. During the hard times land depreciated about one half.

[letter incomplete]

Johnstown Sept. 7th 1880

Register of U. S. land office

Dear Sir:

Please find enclosed a copy of certificate of location of $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. of land in Taylor County Iowa, for which I never lifted my Patent. Please send me the Patent for the same if in your office or tell me where and by what method I can obtain it.

If you can not send the Patent return the copy and oblige

Yours Truly. Stephen H. Griffith

[written on the back of the above letter]

U. S Land Office
Des Moines, Iowa

Sept 10 1880

DrSir: Your patent is here. Send the certificate of location
you hold and 50¢ for Regd. Letter with Patent.

Very Respectfully

F. G Clarke
Register

? What is your *cash* price for the land.

C

Bedford, Iowa, Sept. 16th, 1880

S. H. Griffith

Dear Friend

There is trouble about your land. We find a mortgage on it for \$1500 bearing date Feb. 2^d 1880 I feel sure the mortgage was not executed by you although an affidavit is on record affirming that the S. H. Griffith who executed the mortgage is the identical person to whom the Patent [was] issued by the government, but the mortgage was acknowledged [*sic*] before a Notary Public of this Co and I feel certain that if you had been in this Co last Feb. you would have called on us We made the discovery yesterday about 4 O'clock, and immediately commenced an investigation which lasted nearly all night This morning we have come to the conclusion that two men who have been acting as loan agents for foreign loan companies and have suddenly sprang from poverty to affluence have been engaged in an immense swindle Of course the mortgage is worthless but it constitutes a cloud upon the title to your land which will have to be removed by an action in court, which may cost you a little something and cause some delay in consumating the sale, but as the purchaser does not want

to make improvements before spring, and we can get the cloud removed by that time, I think it will not prevent the sale. I will keep you advised in regard to the matter. In the mien time hold yourself in readiness to come here on the shortest kind of notice. I may telegraph you. I am certain we are about unearthing a big affair

Respectfully

E Houck

Bedford, Iowa, Sep 23^d 1880

Stephen H Griffith
Johnstown Penn

Dr Sir

Last week, Edwin wrote you about a mortgage of \$1500, dollars on your land I at once de-claird it a forgery and went to work to ferit out the guilty parties. Since then forgeries of Notes & Mortgages to the amount of \$7500.⁰⁰ hav been discoverd and the Money loaned on these Securities. How much more they will find is yet to be determined but I presume not less than \$50,000 Two Men that ware agents for the Scotland trust and loan Co of Edinburg Scotland Suddenly became very welthy and I spotted them at once, and as yet hav no reasons to change my Mind.

Bedford is boiling with excitement over the discovery. Men from Muscatine Iowa and from Kansas City are here looking after their interests. The Notes and Mortgages forged were sent from Bedford to the subagency at Muscatine from there to N Y. City and from there to the home office in Edinburg Scotland, whare the money comes from. Thus you see the real evidence of their guilt is a long way off. The Men I charged it upon does not deny but that there is a big steal but say that parties representing themselves as Stephen H Griffith and Wife came and made the loan. But their Ex-

planaition is entirely to thin to rais suspicion from them. They hav already retained 5 of the leading lawyers in town to defend them. I will hav to close as it is mail time. Of course your title is all right but the court will hav to cancel to [the] mortgage if the Scotland trust and lon Co do not, of their own accord.

More soon,

Yours Truly

A S Houck

[fragment]

The parties here, who ware agents for the Muscatine agents who were agents of the N. Y agents who in turn were [a]gents of the Scotland loan and trust Co have assumed the payment of the whole matter viz \$10000 and hav secured the payment by other Mortgages on their real estates. When I discoverd the Mortgage on your land I cald it a forgery openly on our streetes and it raised the wind at once, the parties at Muscatine were Sent for, and an investigation commenced whitch reveald the fact that about ten thousand dollars hav been obtained in these forgeries, by some one.

The whole matter has been settled by agreement, and the Matter will here drop, without criminal prosecution.

Our Winter has been long and severe and more rain and mud this spring than usual.

Hoping this may find you well I remain as ever yours

A. S. Houck