

'In good Iowa style'

The Kelsey Letters, 1848 to 1882

edited by Susan Kuecker




Fascinating details of life in Iowa, 1848–1882, are revealed in the following series of letters written by the Kelsey family, who settled near Cedar Rapids, Iowa. These excerpts are taken from the complete collection of letters, archived in the Linn County Historical Museum.

The complete collection provides particularly rich material on early farming, foods, and religion. Roughly two-thirds of the collection appears here. Some material has been omitted, including most references to Rogers and Kelsey relatives in New York, some lengthy religious references, frequent crop reports, responses to previous

letters, and some detailed accounts of financial matters.

Spelling and grammar largely have been left intact. For ease of reading and in the interests of space, commas and periods replace the dashes that frequently appeared in Harriet Jane Kelsey's earlier letters. The beginnings of sentences have been uniformly capitalized. Each letter's origin and date have been combined in one italicized line. Material in brackets has been inserted. Brief commentaries precede and intersperse the letters to provide historical context and background.

— *The Editor*



IN THE FALL OF 1848, John Kelsey, a twenty-nine-year-old carpenter from Niagara County, New York, headed west to buy land. He had with him several land warrants for 160 acres each. In 1847, Congress had provided these land warrants for qualified veterans of the Mexican-American War. Veterans could sell their warrants to others, and John had obtained several. Over one-third of Iowa's thirty-six million acres were claimed this way. John Kelsey was doing what many others did.

During his search for land, John wrote his family in New York. Eight of his letters appear here. As he indicated, in timber-scarce Iowa, early settlers valued wooded land over prairie. Large amounts of wood were needed for fencing, building, and fuel. He urged his relatives to buy land in Iowa before the choicest parcels were gone and prepared them for the high cost of starting a farm.

People on the frontier longed for news of friends and relatives. Although these feelings have generally been attributed to women,

John's letters demonstrate that men also felt the same way. Nevertheless, his letters are often laced with a humorous mocking of formal writing styles.

John Kelsey bought land near Cedar Rapids, then "thirty or forty, mostly one-story unpainted houses," according to one settler's account. The boarding house he operated was the first in Cedar Rapids, Coffman Hotel. Despite his confident predictions, it was another ten years before the railroad reached Cedar Rapids, and over seventy years before Cedar Rapids became the county seat.

Madison, Wisconsin, Sept 12, 1848

Dear Brother

Agreeable to promise I now take my pen to Write you a few lines. I am Enjoying good health Except a little mad on the account of delays on the road *here*. I have been two days coming from Milwaukee to this place a distance of 80 miles which is very slow I think.

. . . I am on my road to Du buke Iowa State where I intend to purchase as I can get my pick of 30 Soldiers Rights which is 160 Ac Each for \$130.00 and I think if I cannot find a location in all that it must be a poor sight. . . . From your Brother, John

Cedar Rapids, Feb. 16#, 1849

Dear Parents Brothers & Sisters

and all to whome those presence may concern

I J.H. Kelsey of the Town of Cedar Rapids County of Marion State of Iowa of the first part to the above named individuals of the second part doth Send greetings and sayth that I of the first part am enjoying good firstrate and ever to be thankful for the enjoyment of Life Health Liberty and the freedom of Speech and the Press and hope that the above named Parties of the first part are enjoying the Same blessing. You seem according to your letter to be under a great mistake concerning that Land. You think part is across the River and would not be convenient to get at and therefore came to the conclusion that it is best not to buy it. But it is all on one side of the River and is highly necessary in order to Make a good Farm to have it and it can be sold any time for as much again as we have to

give for it. I have drawn a map of the Farm as near as I can with a discription of the Same and by buying the Fraction of 65 acres we can keep the 30 odd and nothing will be said about it as it is so small it will be overlooked by a person

"Their is not Timber enough on the Farm to support it . . . and I am so much afraid that some one Els will Enter it away from us that I hardly Know what to do some times."

looking on the map. I think by measurement in the 65 acre lot their are 75 acres or more as the Fractions are always under rated in the General survey as they want to make the Rivers as large as possible . . . it is highly necessary it should be added to the present Farm and their is not Timber enough on the Farm to support it if we intend to make it a Homestead and I am so much afraid that some one Els will Enter it away from us that I hardly Know what to do some times. If we do not get the Timber Land the first man that I can trade it to will get it, as I consider that the most valuable part of the Farm as Timber is very scarce here and every body is anxious to get some Timber Land. You wished to Know which is the best cheapest and Quickist way to come to this place. . . . I will send you Word. You wish to Know about the Markets here and a great many other

"I should like to go to California this Spring . . . to embark in the Gold Expeditions now is the time. Next Spring may be Everlastingly to late."

things. . . . I am 75 miles from Du Buque, 60 from Bloomington [Muscatine], 23 from Iowa City (the Capital), 5 from the county seat which is to be moved to this place. The Railroad is to go through this place. Wheat at this place is

worth from 40 to 60 cents per bushel, corn from 10 to 18, Oats 10@20, Potatoes none, Lumber 8@12 per thousand, Tea the best articles and that very poor 50@1.35#, Sugar 8@15, Coffee 12@18, Calicos 10@38, Cloth 25@1000 per yds. . . . I have received my Card from the [Masonic] Lodges and so has Green [Judge George Greene, a Cedar Rapids founder]. I should like to go to California this Spring as the best men we have in this part of the Country are going and all those that wish to go now is the time and all that . . . wish to embark in the Gold Expeditions now is the time. Next Spring may be Everlastingly to late and if you hear of my being there you must not be surprised. I wish you would answer that letter that I Last wrote. On that map the 80. and two fortys are Entered and all we want to make a good Farm is the Odd 65 Acres. [Letter from John Kelsey]

Cedar Rapids, February 19, 1849

Dear Brother

You may think Strange that I write to you again so soon but my circumstances are such that I am obliged to do So — I did not intend to call on you for some money in a hurry, And trust luck for the land, but if you can send enough to buy that 65 acres and 25 dollars more, I shall be much obliged and in fact I must have 25 dollars immediately as I have rented a large Boarding House with a man in this place and must have 25 dollars to help start it. My object for renting the House is to make my board clear which I think I can do by close management. . . . I think I have given up going to California this spring and intend making preparations for going next. Don't fail to send me 25 dollars as soon as you receive this as I am in want of the money and will have to try and borrow that amount until you send it, so don't fail to do so as I want to Keep my word good, don't fail. Love to all — Yours &c. John H. Kelsey

Cedar Rapids, July 17th, 1849

Dear Brother

Yours Dated July 4th was duly received and agreeable to your request I haste to reply in order to have that Money sent as soon as possible. . . . I saw Mr Bradstreet last evening and he says he cannot have any Money under three

weeks and thinks if I cannot wait so long for the Money he cannot take the Lien as he cannot pay for it short of that time. . . . You May depend Land is getting Scarce about here. They have Commenced harvest . . . Wheat. Looks Well.

My Love to all. (I am Well). John H. Kelsey . . .

Cedar Rapids, August 29th, 1849

Dear Father

Your Draft for Eighty Dollars arrived Yesterday and I haste to reply. As Whether it Was in time or not I cannot say as I have to go to the City first. . . . You say you cannot come out this fall at least our folks would not be willing and I think you had best not start until the [?] comes as I do not know of any thing you could do for a living out here alone. . . . This from your affectionate Son J.H. Kelsey . . .



Cedar Rapids, Nov # 29. 1849

James

I suppose you by this time have your fall Work all done up and Know about how you stand in the World in regard to Money Matters and Whether you can come out here in the Spring or not. If you intend to come at all the Sooner the better as real Estate is rising very fast. Last fall when I came here not half of this Town was taken up and now there is hardly a foot of vacant Land in it. . . . There is a man here now with about 3000 fruit Trees. I wish if you have it you would send money enough to buy some and split some Rails on the figure. from your Brother John

I have Joined the Masons. Oddfellows are very thick as well as Masons & Sons of Temperance.

Cedar Rapids, November 29, 1849

Lydia Ann

I should like to know that reason that you do not write to me as often as one time in the space of three Months. You Know what you promised if not I will tell you. It was that you would Write as often as you could. You think that I might Write More often than I do well admitted but that is no reason that you should not Write to Me. I am Well and doing better. I made the first six months I was in this Town about \$150. and then sold out as I did not like the busness in the winter time. . . .

We have a very good society at this place both old and young, Merry and Sad.

I suppose you and your little family are enjoying yourselves on the fat of the Land for instance Eating apples and drinking *CIDER*. I Wish You would send a barrel of apples and another of Cider to Mix in a letter. Apples here are only 3¢ a piece and poor ones at that and Cider we never think of. But Enough of this. I wish you would Write and tell me all the News such as deaths, Weddings &c. from Your Brother John

Cedar Rapids, February 12, 1850

Dear Brother

. . . It is all important that I should Know what your in ten tions are concerning the coming Spring as I am anxious to be doing something Either for the Family or myself and if you are Coming in the Spring it is necessary to have a place to go into and now is the time to act if we as a great many are going to California and these who have Property are selling for half the value to get money to go with. Property is rising very fast. Lots that could of been bought one [year?] past for \$50 now Cannot be Bought for \$100. . . . Getting timber for the House & Barn . . . will cost about \$25. More Lumber & drawing same will cost \$125. so you can see it will cost the big end of two hundred Dollars to start with and besides I want to build in the City. Now if you are Coming say so and if not say so. . . . James might do very well here . . . with a team or at Work at Carpentry. . . . I want him to buy some tools at Buffalo and bring on with him such as ½ inch & ¼ in Match Plains one panel Plow one set of [firming?] the Pannel Plow will cost 10 or \$12. You can see by the way that I have cut out my cloth I must want a larger Pattern than I have of my

own. . . . If you do not [send money] I must of necessity stop all further doings on the Farm for the present and when you come you will have to look out for your self.

. . . Give my Love to all, J.H. Kelsey

JOHAN KELSEY'S PRODDINGS for his family to move west finally succeeded. In 1850 and 1851 brother James Cooper Kelsey, his parents, Rachel and Charles Kelsey, and sisters Mary and Kate, arrived in Cedar Rapids. (Charles moved back east in 1854 after his wife's death. John and Kate moved on in the 1860s. Mary and James settled there.)

James, thirty, worked as a carpenter for over a year until he earned enough to build a house and improve the land he had purchased from brother John, five miles west of Cedar Rapids on the Cedar River.

After James finished his fall farm work in 1853, he returned to New York to marry thirty-year-old Harriet Jane Rogers and bring her to Iowa. Jane's letters to her own family in Niagara County, New York, begin the next summer with her description of an Iowa Fourth of July celebration. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Fourth of July was the most universally celebrated holiday in the nation.

For three decades, Harriet Jane Kelsey continued to write her father, Adam Rogers; her brother, William Orendo Rogers; and his wife, Mary. The letters are often signed "Jane" or "H.J.K." Jane's husband, James Kelsey, often added his thoughts. Jane covered each sheet with words, often not sending it until the page was covered and the margins filled. Communication with family and friends back east was vital to her. Her letters often refer to people and places in New York, and she longed for a chance to "talk till long after we should all be asleep." She apparently kept track of her correspondence by writing "Ans." on the letters she had answered and stored in the secretary in their "Cottage Home."

James and Jane's first child, a son, was still-born in September 1854. In February 1855 they adopted an infant, John Calvin Foote, whose mother had died. Their son Heinrich was born in January 1856. Daughter Ettie arrived in July 1857, followed by twins Ida and



Harriet Jane (Rogers) Kelsey.
She often signed her letters
"Jane" or H.J.K.

Ada in November 1858 and Eric in September 1860.

In the late 1850s the Kelsey home was a stop on the stage coach line running from Cedar Rapids to Waterloo. In 1858 the stop was named a post office, Mon Dieu, and James was named postmaster. Mon Dieu never developed into a town and in 1862 the post office was dropped.



Cedar Rapids, July 4th, 1854

Dear Mary —

What are you about on this great day of our country? I presume to say you did not go to Middleport. Have you any kind of doings about there? I'll tell you what we are about. Father is sitting in the front door enjoying the pleasant breeze. Mary is on the lounge. Catherine is in the large Rocking chair. James is sitting on the side of the bed. I at the stand before the bedroom window, &c. . . . We had our dinner of roast pig, green peas, new potatoes and other chicken fixings. James invited a poor old gentleman residing in the next house to dine with us, we enjoyed our dinner very much. The Methodist S. Society has a fair this evening. I presume some of us will go down. The avails of the dinner & fair go towards erecting the Church. They have the foundation and other preparations. The location is a very pleasant one. . . . I have not attended a Quarterly Meeting since I came here. They have all been at a distance except one. . . .

. . . The leise [lace?] came very safely. I put it on my bonnet and wore it last Sunday. . . . I guess you thought rather strange to find some letters for the girls in my last. It was some of my economizing. I wrote to all of the girls at the same time, and when we came to put them up, the budget was too heavy so I tucked a part in

yours. I have thought of another thing when you have an opportunity to send, my rolling pin, that was in the back room. The foot-cushion. There is a little book in the kitchen book cupboard that I used to claim & I have wished for several times as a book of reference, The Mother's Catechism I think. Father [James's father, Charles Kelsey] talks of going east this summer, but it is so warm at present we do not like to have him start.

. . . The crops are very promising, the winter wheat is nearly ready to cut. Spring wheat is ripening. Oats look beautiful, some of the corn higher than James can reach, and in tassel. . . .

Best wishes for all the friends and neighbors, Sunday school Class, Superintendent, Teacher, Minister. &c. &c.

And now a Good bye till some other time. I have been thinking if Orendo could only leave at this season of the year, now is the pleasantest time to see the country. Yours &c., H. J. K.

Cedar Rapids, Dec. 24th, 1854

Dear Mary &c.

Yours was received in due time and as I propose to have no unanswered letters on hand Jan 1st 1855, if I should live to see that time, I take the present time to write a little to you — James thought he would write some too — I think between us perhaps we may fill a sheet. . . . Orendo really gone to Michigan! Why a hitch of two more would have brought him here, across the great "Massissippi." This distance does not seem so great. The cost is the greatest item. . . . Lydia Ann sent a great wheat bag full of dried fruit. We divided them around. . . . The girls are living in the village. So James and I are alone most of the time. . . . I often think if we had one boy now it would be a great deal of company for us. But no — his grave is within that small inclosure yonder in the grove, by the side of his Grand Mother. I look at it and think, he is mine still, though not with us in body. . . . My health is very good now. I have not more ague [malaria] symptoms. No, we did not raise many tomatoes, but had a great many from one of the neighbors. Made Catsup, wine, &c.

. . . How is father getting along? Does he think he could stand a journey to Iowa? I would

like to show him where I live, for I think it is a pretty place, considering the time it has been improving and we have neighbors on the west about as near as Mr. Lerch's to you and on the east. . . . I have three letters to write yet this week, then I believe I shall be even A Good bye with love to All, H. J. K.



Mon Dieu, May 3rd, 1858

Dear Father —

. . . This has been a rainy day, and we have had a good many of them this spring so much so that the work of the season is getting behind, the ground being too wet to do much with.

James has got some over 30 bushels of wheat sown, and between 10 & 11 bushels of Poland Oats. We have put in a few garden seeds and that is about the extent. Some about here have got their corn planted but I should be afraid it would rot. The currants and Wild Plums are in full bloom.

We have a good many trees right about here. One pasture field of 40 acres has several patches, we had many a good feast of the plums last fall, and I think I relished them as well as I used to the cultivated varieties. They are to be eaten the same as grapes, suck out the pulp, and reject the rind. Give me a pail of good ripe ones and I can feast and fat. I used to often wish that some of my folks from Old Niagara could take a feast with us. We have over 50 very nice tame currant bushes, red & white, and a row of black ones. These are not good for much only to eat from the bushes or with sugar & cream. They then resemble the whortleberry [huckleberry]. We have a good many gooseberry bushes set out. . . . Our apple trees are looking nice this spring, not blossomed yet.

The Pie Plant [rhubarb] is looking well. The asparagus not done very well as yet seems to be coming on slowly however.

I inclose a fan for Miss Fanny which we have manufactured from the tail of a Prairie Chicken. If we could have sent one of the fowls, we would like to do so, then you could have a fry. These fowls are speckled all over, the color you see. They are wild and can be tamed about as well as a quail. They are not as plenty as they were, having been hunted off.

The quails nearly all froze to death or smothered under the deep snow a year ago last winter so they are not very plenty.

We are milking 4 cows or rather heifers all but one. I want to try to make a little cheese if I can but I do not know how I shall make out.

There were 11 baptized down to the creek near by the school house yesterday by the United Brethren. They are getting quite a good many members in this vicinity. The Methodists obtained a few last winter in the neighborhood beyond. . . . The Baptists have been making some stir also. A good deal of religious interest has been manifested generally.

. . . Well father I see I must close my story for this time. Hoping to hear from him often I will subscribe myself his daughter Jane—

All well. There was a good deal of scarlet fever about last winter, but our family escaped. . . .

Mon Dieu, May 5t, 1858

Dear Bro

. . . You wish to Know if the Cars were running to Cedar Rapids: They do not — The nearest Point of Rail Power to Cedar Rapids is Iowa City twenty five miles, Crossing the Mississippi at Rock Island. The Chicago Iowa and Nebraska Cars Run within forty miles of this place. The Chicago and Dunleith [East Dubuque] Cars Run to Dubuque seventy five miles: The stage from: Iowa City to this place is by day light the Other is mostly by night: If I were

“The weathr has been so unfavourable, every thing is very backward. . . . River On a High and Produce Low.”

coming through I should come by way of Iowa City. You will no doubt be surprised at receiving letters at so rappid a pace! But dont be alarmed you shant be Hurt! If anything . . . is going to Happen: Please inform us in time that we may have our shoes Greased And have on a Boiled shirt. The weathr has been so unfavourable, every thing is very backward. . . . River On a High and Produce Low. . . . Yours Truly, James C. Kelsey

Mon Dieu, July 25, 1858

Dear Brother, Sister and Friends

. . . It is quite likely you can come by Rail Road to our town, before long, as the Clinton Road is now within 25 miles — and they are at work on the rest. You will see by the papers that Our Steamboat has made its first trip. James was down and saw it. Said it was a fine affair. Our river is on a high, being 15 feet above *High Water Mark*. At Waterloo 55 miles above here there were but very few houses that had not the water up to the second story. . . . Many a field will never be touched.

I am very sorry to say that our Poland Oats have left us. The straw grew rank and looked well until the rust struck it and now it lays flat, a perfect blight, so we are out of the seed. James had thought to have quite a crop this year, and have promised seed to several, but alas for human, all human calculations when an All wise Providence sees otherwise.

Corn is growing very rank but not much prospect of ears. One man near town said he had corn 14 feet high and no ears nor any appearance of ears. I do not know what a great many will do if the crops are all a failure.

. . . You recollect Frances Cotton. I frequently get letters from her. The last was the latter part of May, while at school in Dubuque. It is a beautiful letter, very elegantly written, and well composed! If she has improved in person and mind as her letters have improved since we first corresponded, she must certainly be a fine young lady, I do not mean in fine feathers, but in reality. . . .

. . . I am alone with my babies and work. James is trying to get a girl to come till harvest is over. It makes a good many steps for one to take. And I have not told you any thing about our celebration of the "4th" just across the

street. The Star Spangled Banner waved over our heads. The Cedar Rapids Band gave us sweet music. Several speeches, and a good dinner, with about 200 to partake. Lemonade & Soda &c. . . . H.J. Kelsey

BY 1860 JANE AND JAMES KELSEY could have considered their farm a success. It was valued at \$4,420, above average for that township. The 1860 federal farm census also reported that the Kelseys produced fifty pounds of cheese that year, so Jane must have succeeded in making cheese — her concern in a May 1858 letter. The Kelseys grew crops then common to Iowa, and Jane in particular reported on the crops, weather, and farm work frequently. She also wrote about fruit trees. Beginning in the late 1840s large numbers of fruit trees were planted in Iowa, especially by settlers from orchard-growing regions such as western New York. Her descriptions of Christmas reflect the more elaborate celebrations that had developed by mid-century.

James was active in community affairs, though mention of this appears seldom. He was an early vice-president of the county agricultural society founded in 1857. At various times he served as township assessor, supervisor, road commissioner, and school director.

In 1861 Jane finally made a long-delayed visit to New York. Her strong ties to eastern family and friends are evident throughout the complete collection of letters (some of this material has been omitted).

The profound effect of the Civil War on Americans is suggested by the fact that this is the only national event mentioned in more than thirty years of Kelsey correspondence. The war figured in many Kelsey letters of the early 1860s. Half the male population of Iowa took part in the war, and Iowa troops were involved in the major Northern victories in the West. Jane grieved over the soldiers killed from the Cedar Rapids area. The loss of Iowa troops was indeed great — approximately 13,000 died of an estimated 72,000 to 76,000 Iowa soldiers. She also complained about the economy — the aftereffects of the Panic of 1857 and then high taxes. Federal, state, and local taxes did increase during the Civil War,

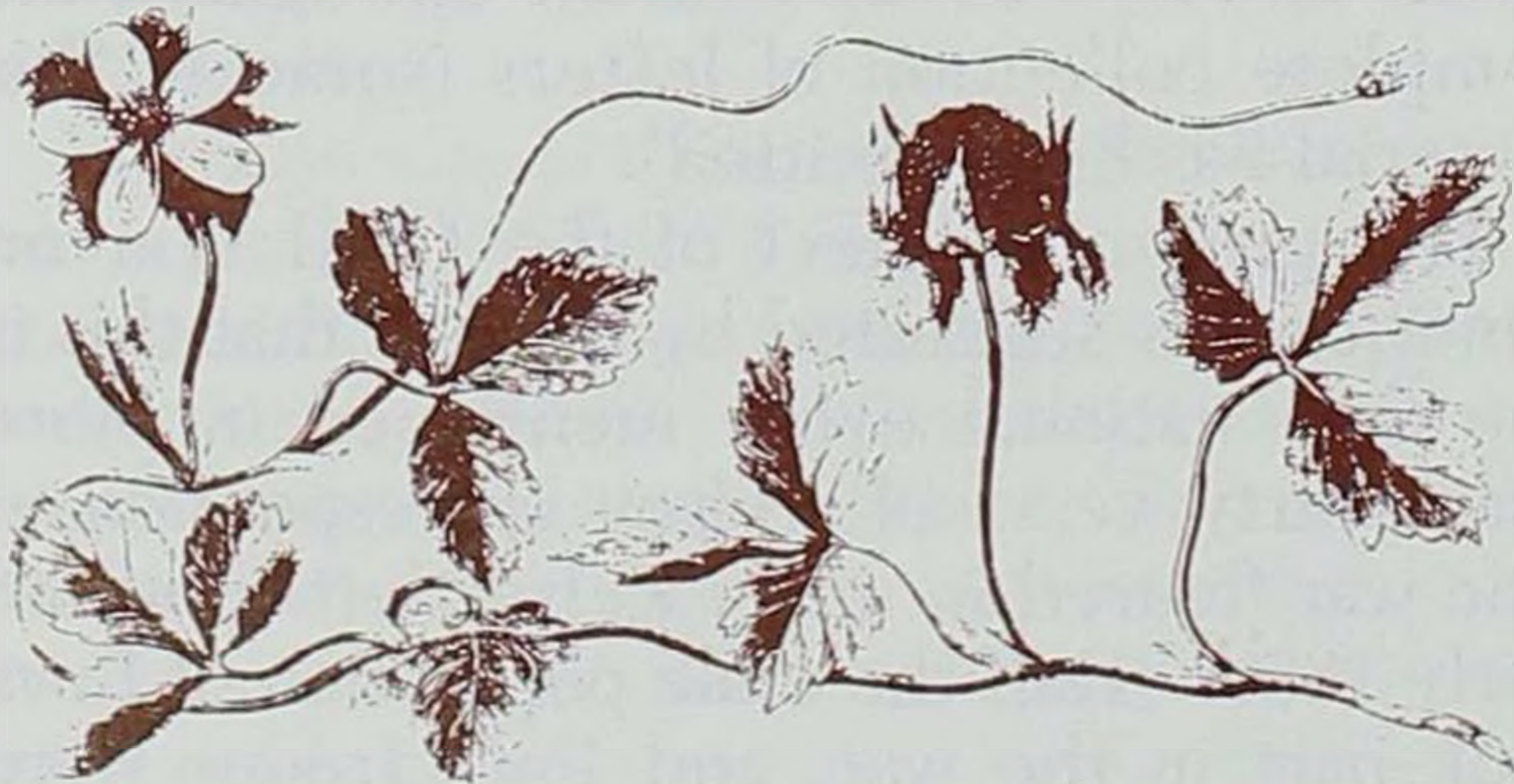
although the 1862 Iowa General Assembly passed measures to lessen the tax burden. By 1863, however, the war began to bring prosperity.

Iowa turned Republican during the Civil War. In 1861 James Kelsey was a Democrat; by the end of the war he had become an active Republican.

The chinch bug (or "chintz bug") was a native insect of the Iowa prairie. As early as 1846 crop losses were attributed to it in Linn County. Twenty counties, including Kelsey's Linn County, were hard hit by the 1862 outbreak. Chinch bugs preferred wheat over oats and corn, and were one reason that Iowa farmers stopped growing wheat as a main crop by the 1880s.

In August 1862 Jane gave birth to her last children, twins Louis and Louise. There were now eight children under the age of eight (five of these under age four). Her references to being overworked and wanting hired help are understandable.

The "molasses" referred to in their 1862 letters was probably sorghum, first imported in the United States in 1853. By 1858 there was intense interest in the crop in Iowa. During the Civil War sorghum was an alternative for hard-to-obtain cane sugar. The Kelseys owned portable refining equipment and James did custom refining for neighborhood customers — 288 gallons in 1859.



Mon Dieu, May 6th, 1860

Dear Relatives —

. . . Before I had the breakfast table cleared [a few mornings ago] the mail come in with your letter, and as matter of course we all sat right down, and meanwhile the dishwater boiled, the bread ran over and things in general but what of all that. We have just got home from meeting I find a half sheet of blank paper,

a little leisure time and I wished to commence a letter home, so I will do with this till James goes to town again. . . . Last Friday morning the old Glee Book Came in, looking as natural as life itself, with a new dress on. I opened it "A Relic of bygone days" — Ah! what volumes I read in those few words. I took a hum at the tunes along through before I could do up the morning's work.

. . . The Methodist minister preaches once in four weeks at our schoolhouse and once in four weeks at the school House beyond us, so

"There is to be a collection for the Bible Society, away out here in this new country, would you have thought it?"

that gives us Methodist preaching once in two weeks in our vicinity. The United Brethren preach once in two weeks at our S.H. that gives us 3 sabbaths out of four at our S.H. I think we are pretty well favored for a country place. . . . There is to be a collection for the Bible Society, away out here in this new country, would you have thought it? . . .

Sunday Evening, Dec. 30, 1860

Dear Relatives

We are in the midst of winter and wintery is the weather. It froze on our kitchen stove last night and it is full as cold tonight. We have snow enough to make it comfortable getting about. But I think we are to have more snow if Sun dogs are any sign. There were three followed the Sun all day yesterday. At noon the sight was most magnificent. The one in the Zenith resembled a rainbow, describing about one fourth of a circle.

If all goes right some of you *may* have a chance to know me before many months pass. Do not become agitated quite yet. . . . I really hope Father has recovered from his illness. I want to see him again. I almost tremble when I think of his extreme age — and we are not left fatherless yet.

. . . Oh! The little boy's name is Eric Cyril. We talked some of calling him Orendo but James came across the name of Cyril and we



concluded that was odd enough and would rhyme with Eric better.

How was Christmas with you? We had a Christmas tree for the children. The boys got a sled, the girls got each of them a homemade dolly, Ettie's nearly as long as Eric. Pie cakes Candy, Popped Corn, &c. We had some calls in the P.M. Just at dusk James took care of the baby while I called in at our next neighbor to see their Christmas tree, when I returned James took the boys & went over and spent the rest of the evening. They had other company in, quite a children's party.

Jan. 13. . . . New Year's passed without any extraordinary doings, the 3rd we butchered. Then of course I was pretty busy. The next day I went over on the Prairie to Mrs. Smith's, a sort of a neighborhood party. Last week there was a gathering at our next neighbors. They told me they would come here this week. Lydia, whom I expected to keep through the winter has been away some six weeks or two months [except] three days in butchering. Besides that I have been and am now alone with my work and my children. James is all the help I have about the house. I mistake, my boys help me. They take care of the baby while I work, bring in wood and various other little

“How does South Carolina get along with you. It is quite a topic of conversation here. Some can almost hear the cannon and see the smoke. I hope the trouble will not last long.”

chores. . . . They are complaining some of hard times about here. James was in town yesterday, and he said it was impossible to get a penny in change. Sometimes I am almost afraid we can not get the funds necessary for me to go east in the Spring. If prices should come down it would be hard times indeed. . . . How does South Carolina get along with you. It is quite a topic of conversation here. Some can almost hear the cannon and see the smoke. I hope the trouble will not last long. Great country this. Happy people. Some seem to let their ambition run away with them, and thereby bring trouble on themselves and others. But I suppose they must have something to keep up the excitement.

. . . All are in bed and asleep. James has got the baby and gone to bed too so I am quite alone, and feel lonesome over it. . . . We have not had rains enough yet this season to fill the wells, and Cedar River is very low, but little grinding done in town. Excellent sleighing, good comfortable winter weather, and such beautiful moonlight nights. . . . There is more

“Such beautiful moonlight nights. . . . There is more brilliancy and clearness about the moonshine than there is in your place.”

brilliancy and clearness about the moonshine than there is in your place. It is sometimes really charming. . . .

. . . Often when I am listening to my boys reading I think of the time when that was my business from morning till night. Read, read, read. Books, books, books. I do not get time to hear the children as I ought. . . . Your sister. Jane —

Mon Dieu, Apr 3d, 1861

Dear Brother and all —

I am in great haste but stop to scribble a few lines by way of warning. It is now my intention to start from here next tuesday. . . . James says you need not mind so much about greasing your shoes, but . . . provide plenty of hog-

meat and corn dodgers. . . . Yours &c. H.J. Kelsey

Mon Dieu, April 17, 61

Dear Bro

You may think me not in my right mind? to write a few lines to you? Yet such is not the case! I believe if I know myself I am perfectly sane as yet! But I do not know how I shall remain so. As My Wife left here April 9, 61 for the State of New York and we have heard nothing from her and of course we are quite uneasy with regard to her welfare! We are all well at home. Our spring is very . . . soured on account of heavy rains. . . . What do you think about *War* and the safety of *Old Uncle Abe*. I think him in quite a warm place at this time! Fort sumter has gone up or at least that is the talk: and they say General Scott has resigned and Joined the secessionists. If such is the case who *can* we trust? This Glorious Union is *gone gone gone*. . . . Yours Truly, Jas. C. Kelsey



Mon Dieu, June 9, 1861

Dear Brother, Sister and all

Two months today I left this place and set out on my lovely ride. I wandered about . . . and now I am here again in my western home. . . .

. . . Corn two feet high. Potatoes the same. Peas in blossom, onions as large as walnuts, garden looking well generally. Apples as large as the end of your thumb, and a few cherries. Wheat coming in head, timothy waist high. . . . H.J. Kelsey

. . . The barrel and box came safe. . . . They all had a good feast out of those apples. . . . We keep the visit in "mouth" as well as mind.

Mon Dieu, Feb. 2, 1862

Dear Brother Sister and all. —

. . . You may be sure we were glad not only to hear from you but to learn that "those molasses" were safe at home. James was down yesterday, had a little fun with [the shipping agent] concerning this "modus Operandi" of transporting goods and finally told them the barrel was safe. I think I should Have liked to be somewhere behind the curtain, and listened and witnessed [your] drawing of that plug. Methinks I can see you so carefully tapping it first on one side and then on the other. While Mary and the children are standing back, brimful of expectation. As you say no body was hurt. I had a hearty laugh over your graphic description of the same. I told James this morning I wished I could step in some morning and see if you all relished the molasses on these cakes. We would hardly know how to dispose of a pile of buckwheat or meal cakes without it. In fact it has become a great part of our living. We think it more healthy than so much hog meat. We have just opened our last barrel. James has promised eight gallons of that in payment for the eave troughs — that, I think, is all we will spare. I presume we have used a barrel already. We make all our sauce with it (I mean wild fruit,) Preserves of various kinds. . . .

We can all take a piece of Ginger cake about as large as your fist almost any time. Then sometimes for variety I make Ginger Snaps. I fooled Kate completely. She supposed the Cookies were made with sugar, when behold they were nothing but molasses. . . . Mary asks where I spent Christmas, well the day was spent at home, had a good Christmas dinner. One of our neighbors happened in and he ate with us. About the middle of the forenoon Mrs. Albright came in [and] invited James and myself. Well we went, had a good time, Cakes, Candy, Pop corn, Apples, Nuts &c. New Years was spent in preparations for the next day when we had a Dinner Party. Eighteen invited guests. We had some of your dried apples stewed to eat with the chickens, potatoes, cabbage &c. then we had Quince preserves with our cakes. I wish you could have been here that you might have seen some of our society, also an Iowa dinner, and enjoyed it all with us.

. . . I know very well what it is to be tied at

home and can sympathize with Mary. I have not been to the Rapids since I came home last June. I went to Kingston [later part of Cedar Rapids] to Mr. Heaton's the forepart of Sept. I went no where again till in December Eric was so bad. He took the Chicken pox in July, and was not well after that . . . about the first of November he came out in boils and almost covered, quite a while I did not dress him. We bolstered him up in the great chair, for we could not hold him on our laps. After they left him he appeared to be cleared out, for he has been hearty ever since, though not so fleshy as last Sporting. He can creep all about the house again. . . . Emily wrote me that Orendo had the Diptheria. You must have had a time. . . . It seems Orendo is dealing in straw, that is about as profitable as any thing here. James has sold several loads. But I must close and get supper soon. Remember me to all who may inquire after me. Tell Mrs. Depre I would be very glad indeed to wait on her as well as I can for having so many children to wait on. I'll do it in good Iowa style. . . . H.J. Kelsey

Feb. 3d, 1862

Dear Friends

Yours of Jan 22d came safe and sound to hand Feb. 1st. Well that bbl of Molasses really took quite a trip. It is a wonder some one did not taste of it long before it reached propper place of destination. . . . As it seems that you were rather alarmed with regard to the Safety of your Family with regard to the opening of Barrel. It did not contain Gass nor any other dangerous fluid. But simply Kelseys Best Double Refined Maple Syrup [sorghum] perfectly Harmles even on Buck Wheat cakes. We use it in our family nearly every Morning as a beverage and we consider it not very bad to take even on an empty Stomach. We have used nearly one barrel since September and have just taken a cask

*“So Much for the Mollasses.
Now for the War.”*

of 46 gallons, which will last perhaps until I was going to say fall But will say till it is gone. So Much for the Mollasses. Now for the War. What do you think of the Movements of the



Grand Army. I think it will take some time to subdue the South if they do not move a little faster. Two Million Dollars per Day Only think Tax Tax Factory Cloth 18 cts per yard, Coffee 4 lbs for one Dollar, Tea 1.25 per lb and Wheat 50 cts per bushel, Corn 18, Oats 15 and no cash for the latter at that, Pork 1.50 to [2.00] Dollars. Horrid Horrid With taxes almost Double and they must come as our Government Machinery must have Oil or it will heat in the Boxes or more properly I should say the *Government* Rats will have not Malt? As thousand upon thousands are squandered Every day and its all right *Oh We Democrats were so corrupt.* But alas a more hungry swarm has attacked the Tax. I do not attach any Blame on Mr. Lincoln not in the least! I am an administration Man Every time. But some of those Rats of his! They are lining their pockets! Never Mind Every Dog must have their Day! . . . Write soon. Yours &c. Jas. C. Kelsey

Mon Dieu, April 6th, 1862

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . I had neglected my correspondence till I had quite a stack of letters and I have been trying to get up even. . . . A Few days ago brought one from Fannie Witmer, where I visited last spring. They are still very anxious to come west but they had better stay where they can get a little for their produce, till the *War* is over and the *high taxes* all paid. I tell you this



James Cooper Kelsey.
His brother John had
persuaded James and his new
bride, Harriet Jane, to come west.

present institution is grinding the western farmers *almost to Death*.

We thought it was hard enough before, but now they have given the screws another twist, it almost makes us squeal. No kind of cloth short of 15 cts. Every thing we wished to buy, the *highest* possible figures and any thing we had to sell, the *lowest* possible figures, and taxes heaped on till no more stay on. We do not make use of Groceries at all. It seems a very little better than in the winter, calico can be got now for, 12½. I suppose it is all right. We have learned that the Great Grand Army of the Potomac under *Brave, Gallant* General McClellan [McClellan?] has moved a little since they found that the Rebels were all out of sight. Brave boys they! But I suppose it was not the fault of the boys that they had not moved sooner. Of course they could not go till their *Brave Commander in Chief* gave them liberty to move. We read that General McClellan was to give the "Coup de Grace." I made up my mind that he was going to hide in the grass and when our *Western Men* had thrashed treason's guilty band, and chased Rebellion out through the Gulf Stream, in a word, when there was no more to fear from the South — then he would

"Every thing we wished to buy, the highest possible figures and any thing we had to sell, the lowest possible figures, and taxes heaped on till no more stay on."

come out and "Coop." The excuse was the mud was so deep. It dried up amazing quick when Manasses was evacuated. Just look at the endurance, the privations, the hardships our *Western Men* have passed through. They talked not, thought not of the mud, or the rain, or the snow, not even showers of shot and shell stopped them in their course. James has frequent letters from the Army under General Grant. I think that he and Commander Foot [Foote?] are deserving of a little credit, also the men under them. Some are trying to make apparent that Burnside's and the Western



Armies, General Lander and some others were only carrying out Mc.C.'s plans, they were all working under him. Be it so. Which do you consider the most entitled to Bravery, the man that says "Go and take such a fort or town" or those that face the Cannon's gaping mouth, and take those places, it may be at the point of the Bayonet & There will be many a widow, and many a mother will mourn over the untimely death of her sons. There is a funeral today of a man who came home to die. Got home on thursday and died friday. He was married last Spring . . . consequently leaves a young wife. His Mother is a widow who has another son in the Army. She has also four brothers in the Western Army. . . . I hope the war will be pushed on with increasing vigor, for I want it ended. I am sick of every day's report of war and carnage. . . . But I must close this chapter and change the subject. I know not where to stop when I get to talking or writing on the all absorbing topic of the Day.

Orendo talks about an Oyster Supper, well we had an Oyster Supper last week, grew the Oysters [salsify or oyster plant] in the garden, that is the kind we have to use. . . .

. . . James has just returned from one of the neighbors, where he had been to shave an old gentleman who fell and broke his thigh, some five or six weeks ago. My sheet being full, I will close for the present. . . . H. Jane Kelsey . . .

July 1862

Dear Brother & Sister and all —

. . . James and the three oldest children have gone to Sunday School. Ida & Ada are in

the [parlor] enjoying themselves! Eric is asleep in the "Big Chair" in the kitchen! I am sitting by the great table in the Dining Room. The house [is] all open, doors & windows, to let in the cool breeze, while the sun shines bright without. The birds of different kinds making sweet music in the branches of the trees, which shade our grounds so nicely. We think shade a luxury some of these hot sunny days.

We are having quite a full S. School here at present. Preaching once in two weeks, by the Brethren. The Methodist Minister has abandoned this appointment this summer. So we are as sheep without a shepherd unless we go to town. . . . James has been clearing off and breaking up some more land, and that has brought from one to three men besides my own family to do for. He has one patch of Buckwheat and another of turnips sown on the new ground. He has his timothy in the Barn. He may secure some [prairie] hay if the straw does not promise much. The wheat crop is quite a failure. Some pieces will not be cut at all. What they call the Chintz Bug has made sad havoc. I suppose when the wheat is done with they will attack the corn. . . .

Will you send and save me a very few Ribbon Grass seed, a few of different kinds of Hollyhocks, some sweet Briar & [Smellage?]. Lucy sent me some Sweet Briar, Honeysuckle, Mountain Ash and Red Cedar last fall, but none of them came up. . . . I call more for such as will make roots or shrubs, than for annual flowers, for I cannot well attend to such, with my other duties. We have a great variety and plenty of wild flowers which the children love to gather, but the summer months do not bring us so plenty, in the bush, and the children begin to want flowers. James moved our Post Office to Cedar Rapids week before last, so you will please direct to that place and inform others in your vicinity who may wish to send us any thing. . . . H.J. Kelsey

On the 4th we had a neighborhood picnic in the Albrights grove opposite our house, a very pleasant, agreeable & sociable time. After our dinner was disposed they carried the Melodian over. Mrs. Albright played and some of us sang several pieces, America, Hail Columbia, Star Spangled Banner and several others. Had the Declaration read, two short speeches. . . .

Then they took down the swing and the flags. . . . then we bade each other good bye and [expressed?] feeling that we had enjoyed the day amazingly. . . .

"Cottage Home," Nov. 16, 1862

Dear Relatives,

I suppose you all know that this is our wedding anniversary. . . . It is convenient to commence a letter home just nine years from the very hour that you were all congregated in the old gray house, where I was born, to see us married. Nine years have wrought great changes. . . . Dame Fortune has smiled on some, and frowned on others. Hope and Despair. Peace and War. . . . I am quite differently situated now to what it was nine years ago. I have changed homes and places. The old gray house overlooked by the tall "Balm of Gilead" has been changed for a "Cottage Home" in Iowa, (and this is overlooked by a tall Hickory which stands near the corner.) The Protecting hand of a Father was changed for that of a husband. The faces that had been familiar to me were changed for those of strangers.

The same heart and hand that were given me then are still with me to cheer life's pathway, and to help bear the burden of life. But there are other changes. Olive branches are thick around "about our table." And now you must add to my Family Record

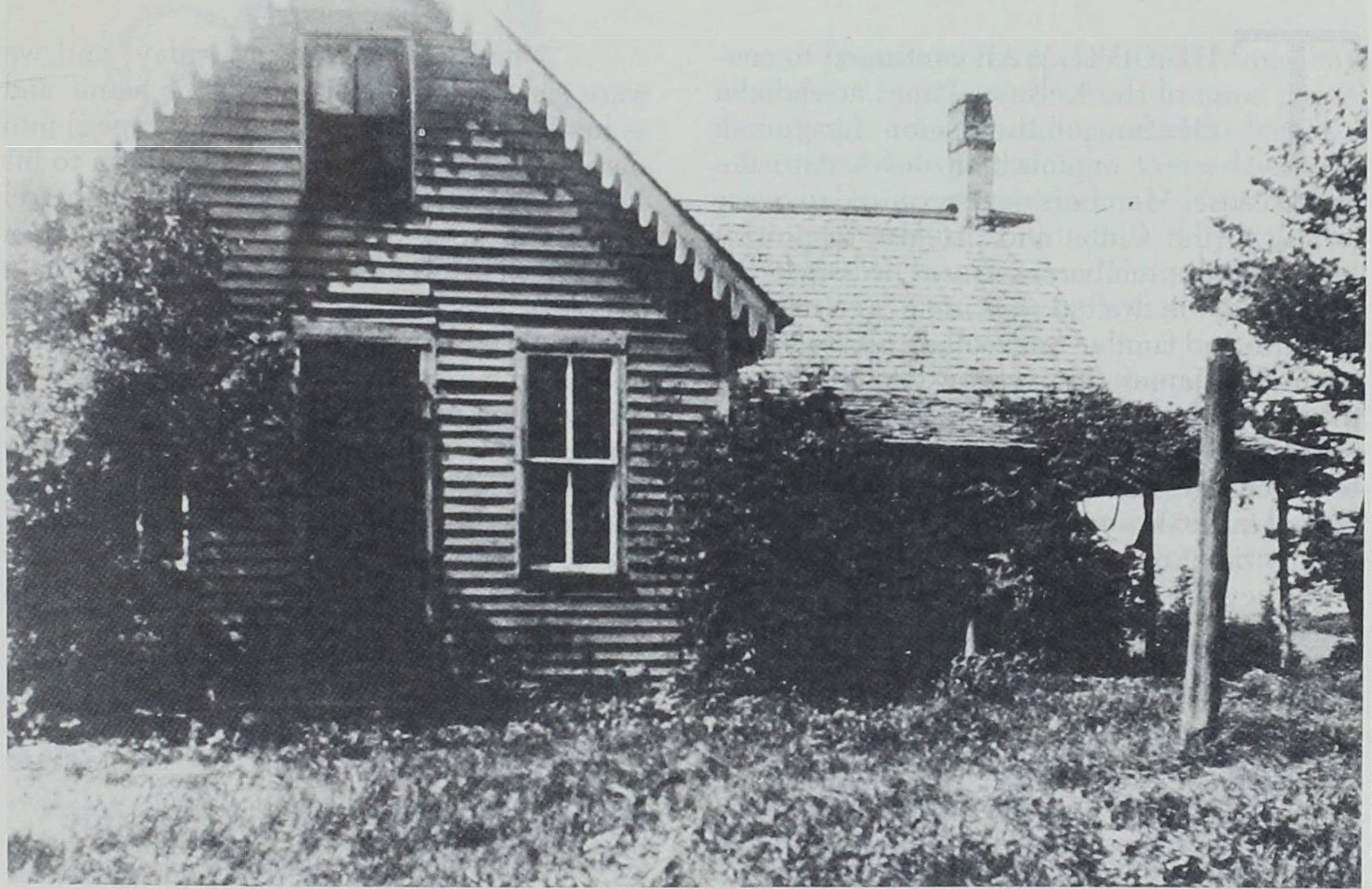
Louis James Kelsey August 26, 1862

Louise Jane Kelsey August 26, 1862

. . . I Have had a good deal to do as you may well guess, for I keep no girl nor have not had since they were a little over three weeks old.

There were near two months that James was a traveling Molasses Factory, which kept him from home very much. He managed to get home once in twenty four hours, that he might see how we were getting along. He would

"I can wash at the tub with my hands, stand on one foot and rock a pair of twins with the other, and accompany the whole with my voice."



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM LINN COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM, ROBERT GOULDIN COLLECTION, COURTESY DOROTHY GOULDIN

In 1862 Harriet Jane Kelsey began writing "Cottage Home" at the top of her letters. From this house, she and James corresponded with relatives back east, describing their farm and urging family to join them.

come late in the evening, milk the cows, help me take care of the juveniles, sleep a little. Up and milk again by the light of the morning star and away again. So I was boss, and us and the children were all hands. You may think I did not have many spare minutes. James has got sick of portable Machinery, it takes him from home so much. He thinks he will try to rig his machinery at home if he should work at it again. He manufactured a little over 40 barrels. . . .

. . . Did I write to you any thing about an old gentleman falling and crippling one of his limbs last winter? He has not walked since. And now what do you think they have done with him. Why his own son took him to the *Poor House*. I thought of My own Father in his helplessness, how differently situated! how differently treated! Even while the old man was there, they would often go from home, leaving him all alone, not even a child to call on. . . . The official to whom Mr. R. went for his papers talked to him strong — told him he would have slept up stairs on corn husks before he would

have sent his father away. . . . It has made quite a commotion about here. . . . James thinks the Supervisors will investigate the matter at this next session. . . . H. Jane Kelsey
P.S. I have come to the solemn conclusion that I could learn to play on the piano if I had an opportunity. I can wash at the tub with my hands, stand on one foot and rock a pair of twins with the other, and accompany the whole with my voice. This does not often occur, however.

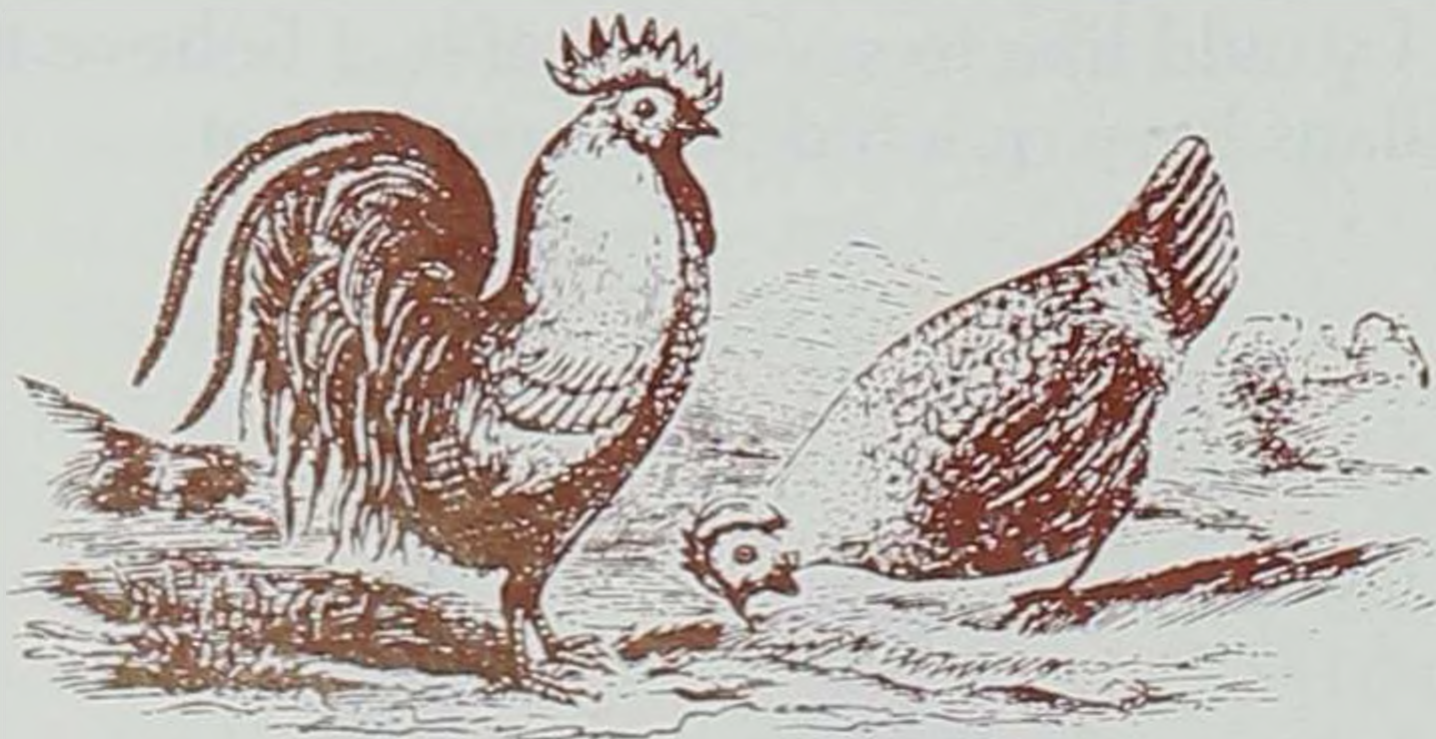
I am glad that Orendo thinks that we can whip the Indians, Rebels and Old England too — I would like to see some of it. I believe the Indians have quieted down somewhat.



THE CIVIL WAR continued to concern the Kelseys. James attended a meeting of the Union League, a secret organization devoted to the Union cause. Members were required to swear loyalty to the Union and promise to protect Iowa. By September Jane was worried that James may be drafted, leaving her to manage the farm and family. As enrolling officer for his township, James was responsible for seeing that the assigned quota was filled as President Lincoln called for troops. Bounties were used to encourage enlistment. A federal draft law, passed in 1863, was only used once in Iowa, to fill an unmet quota.

Kelseys' references to winter wheat in 1863 are unusual. According to agricultural reports, few Linn County farmers still grew winter wheat after 1855. Crop failures between 1846 and 1852 turned farmers from winter wheat to spring wheat.

In 1864 Jane's brother, William Orendo Rogers, purchased land in Iowa, following the death of their father. The Kelseys had long urged family members to buy land. Orendo may have purchased land for speculation, a common practice. Land prices favored buyers during the Civil War. Jane and James advised him on the cost of breaking the virgin prairie for cultivation and fencing the land, which greatly increased the cost of starting a farm. At this time, farmers fenced in their crops rather than their livestock. In March 1864 Jane and James considered selling their farm and buying land less difficult to work, but they sold only a few acres. Wooded land had dropped in value. Lumber could now be shipped in by railroad. The labor of clearing timber was too great.



*"Cottage Home" Clinton Township/1863
Near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, May 10
Dear Brother & Sister & all —*

. . . I had company [last Friday] and we were just done tea as [James] came home, and as he rolled the barrel [you had shipped] into the door I said "come in." He sat down to his supper, asked if we should open the barrel right away. I proposed getting the chores out of the way first. So at it we went, hurried them out of the way and the children to bed, closed the door . . . and proceeded to investigate, with gaping mouths and wondering eyes. . . . Everything was in good condition, down to the dried apples, even to those great sweet apples that made our mouths water. . . . The yarn is nice indeed. I had been wondering what I should make Eric some shirts out of and the likelihood of getting them made very soon even if I had the material was a question in my mind, for I saw so much that needed to be done right

"We are having a fine growing time! Copious showers made every thing move as though it was driven by steam."

away. When lo! they came to me already made. Aprons too — but why enumerate? James sings "There's nothing come amiss to me. My Harrow or my plough." So I say there's nothing comes amiss to me from a dried apple to a child's apron. . . .

. . . This is a pleasant day, and a Brown Thrasher out on one of the trees is telling us of it in every possible way he can. . . . Our garden is beginning to show itself. Hens are laying plentifully and we have fresh milk. . . .

I do not know how it is with the rest, but now that we are left orphans, somehow I feel as though we will draw closer together, that we may bless & help each other. It must seem lonesome enough in the old Home.

[From James:] . . . Jane has written nearly all the news and spared a few lines for me to close or as the Lawyers say to sum up! We are having a fine growing time! Copious showers made every thing move as though it was driven by steam. I have my crops all in and they look well. My Winter Wheat is about a foot high and bids fair for a good crop. My spring Wheat is



the Best in the neighbourhood as it is sown on new land and very Early. I am having a little leisure time now for a few days and am improving it by breaking a pair of colts! . . . If you will take the trouble to call around this way . . . I will . . . show you as handsome a country as I ever saw. . . . J.C. & H.J. Kelsey . . .

"Cottage Home," June 11, 1863

Dear Brother & Sister —

The children are all in bed and James has gone to the schoolhouse to the "Union League." . . .

. . . You wish to know definitely what we think or wish as regards the settlement of the estate [of our father].

James says he thinks it would be a waste of time and means . . . to take it into Court. . . . As I understand, there are not settlements outside of the family, let the family settle. . . .

. . . You have one great question of life now to settle, that is, where you are to make your earthly home. . . . You do not think of clearing up your Michigan land your self, with the expectation of ever being able to plow when the stumps shall have rotted away. After having seen so many whole farms made in one years time it looks like a life-long process to go on to a timbered farm with the expectation of plowing it.

. . . If you make up your mind to move out of Niagara County, I would like to have you see Iowa, see what you think of it. See whether the advantages and disadvantages will balance. Crops do not command as high a price in Market here as they do east, but they all produce with less hard labor.

. . . The last battle near Vicksburg made one widow about two miles from here, another in Kingston. There was one killed from Cedar Rapids. . . . My heart aches for such. What would I if it were my case. Surely, the land mourneth.

. . . Tomorrow I propose to make some currant pies. . . . Yesterday I made some gooseberry pies which were good. We had two swarms of bees today, one yesterday. Bees seem to be increasing just now. One swarm sets very singularly, whether they will stay with us or no I don't know. They may not have any Queen. James has his colts broken so he can tend his corn with them. . . . I do hope that our affairs [concerning the estate] can be settled without any trouble or hard feelings. At the longest, this life is but short, and a probationary state at that. Worldly goods are perishable, why should so many feel as though they wanted all. . . . From your sister, H. Jane Kelsey



"Cottage Home," Iowa, Sept. 20, 1863

Dear Brother & Sister —

Yours of August 1st was duly received, but the babies were both sick by spells, sometimes one and sometimes the other then both, I thought I would wait a little to see how the case would turn. (As they had no teeth I supposed they were undergoing the process of teething.) Sometimes they would have very bad diarrhea accompanied by a good deal of fever, sometimes with vomiting &c. Louise being delicately formed and apparently very frail — was not able to endure. Aug 21st she left us, a weeping circle, to join the throng of happy ones in the Spirit Land.

She had been better for a few days while Louis was worse. I had succeeded in removing her diarrhea and hoped she would be better. Through wednesday night she cried out occasionally as though in extreme pain. Thursday seemed weak and not inclined to amuse herself

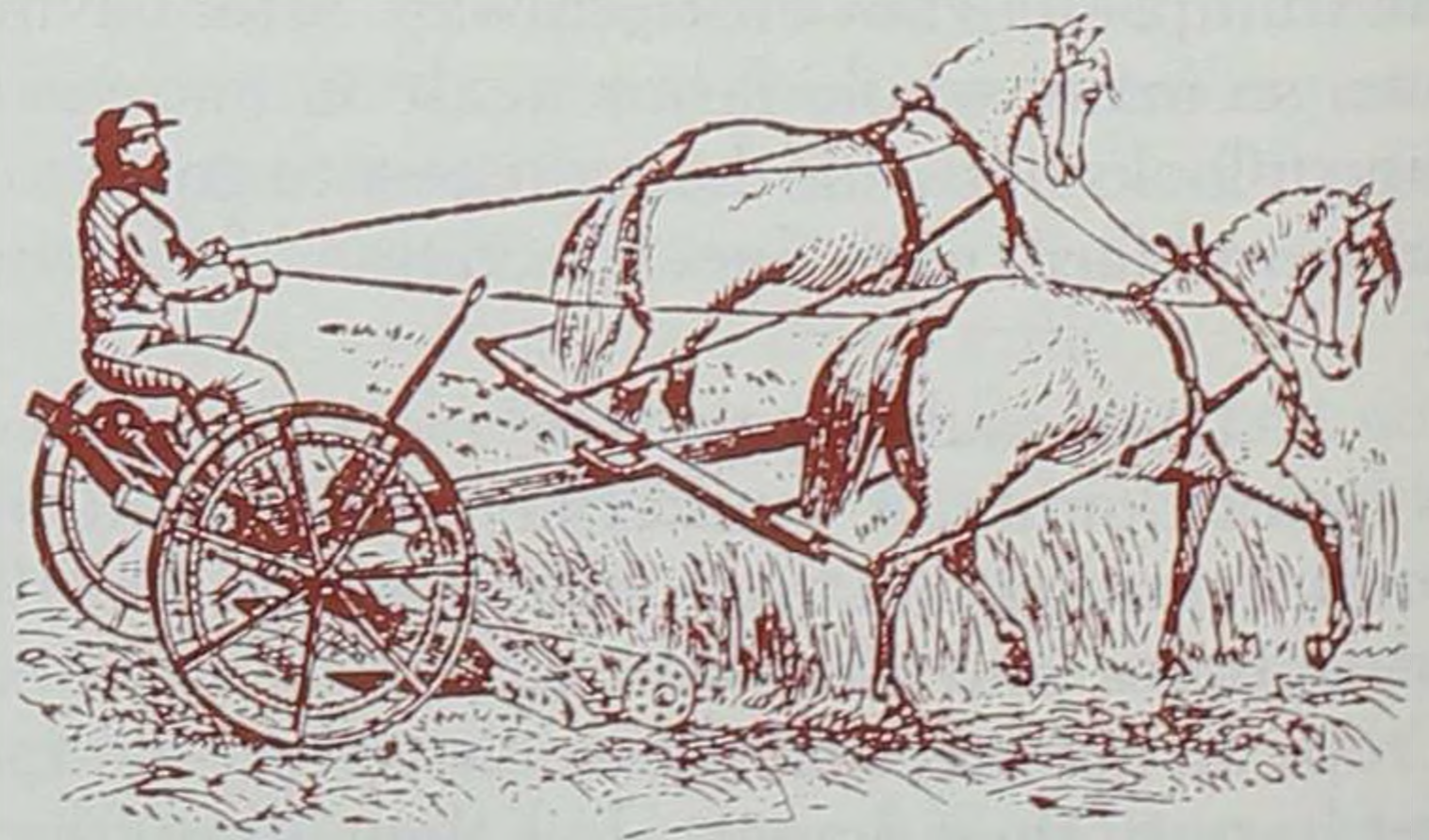
at all, took not much notice of play things. In the afternoon commenced coughing attended with very laborious breathing. Through the Afternoon and evening I applied Mustard occasionally thinking perhaps Inflammation of the Lungs had set in. The symptoms did not abate rather increased — Whenever she attempted to cough she would scream as though suffering extreme pain. At midnight James got up and got me some Imactweed [?] while I kindled the fire and made preparations to administer fomentations — all the way the conviction was silently stealing over me that she would not be with us long. As James was very weary thrashing and expected to go at it again in the morning — I told him he had better lie down while I attended the baby. As I laid the hot flannel on the first time I breathed a prayer that it might relieve her at least. Her cough immediately subsided and she gave but little indication of pain. I attempted to pray for her restoration but I could not. I could find no words to express any such desire. So I bowed before the evil which I saw was smiting me — and prayed for resignation. Here I had my trial alone with my God and my dying child. The fiery ordeal was passed. Though weeping, my soul was calm and peaceful. She gradually failed — life was ebbing out. At three I observed her sight was gone. After a while I called James. Between 5 and 6 I called the children to see their sister die, but she lingered till nearly noon. As I watched her, I felt the full force of the words "Suffering *almost once*," and I could not help but feel glad for her though it was going to make such a breach in our family circle — for she was really a little sunbeam that for a brief space had shone upon us. Her patient, calm look and ways often reminded me of Mother. She needs no more of our care. The Eye that never sleeps watches over her. The Hand that never tires supplies all her wants. And as I know she can not return to me I often ask myself the question shall I go to her? O, that I may not miss of seeing her in Heaven.

Louis has become better, much better indeed, but this afternoon symptoms unfavorable again, no teeth yet, The rest of the family are well, and are blessed with good substantial appetites. I can hardly get enough bread baked or potatoes enough cleaned.

9 O'Clock Monday evening — James has just taken the baby to bed, all are still. I took off my shoes thinking I too would retire. I thought of my letter, stepped to the Secretary and now I am sitting by the table in the dining room close by the bedroom door. I thought if I were at the old house at home I should not retire quite so early, judging by the sittings we had when I was there. . . .

There has been no drafting about here, it is thought by some there will not be. You ask how I feel about it. Last season when there was so much talk of a draft, I was very much troubled about it. I felt as though I could not be left. It would be very unjust to oblige my husband to go. But I have rested quite easy so far this time for, he being a married man between 35 & 45 it is quite likely he will not be called out this time, unless there should be order for another draft. If it comes to the worst that *he must go* — I must do the best I can. He would have been in the field at the first call, had he not thought his services were required here.

I see you keep up the visiting yet, visit a little for me once in a while. . . . I often feel lonely when I think of our diminished number here, especially when I look into the trundle bed. Louise slept with Ettie, after it came warm weather, close by the side of our bed. I now count but three girls in the trundle bed, there is a vacant place. Johnnie, Hokie and Eric sleep in the other bedroom. Write soon — H.J. Kelsey



Clinton [Township], March 30, 1864

Dear Bro

. . . Well I suppose you were so taken up with the country [during your visit] that you would like to have a little piece of your productive soil. If so I have selected 80 acres of

nice Prairie west and adjoining Mr Smiths: It is about four miles west from Cedar Rapids on the direct Road from Cedar Rap. to Toledo and just one mile south of our place! . . . The Land will cost 10 dollars per acre and there is 80 acres in the piece. I might pay considerable down on it if it was not for improving it. I should want about forty acres Broke which will cost 120 dollars and about seven Thousand [feet?] of Fencing which will cost 175 dollars. All these things are necessary in order to make it pay its Expenses. Now I wish you to consider the Matter. And If you cannot buy it yourself let some one Else furnish the means, we think it good investment. Let me Know soon as the opportunity will soon pass for that piece! . . . Yours &c. Jas. C. Kelsey

Dear Brother & Sister —

James thinks the letter will not weigh much more if I write a little, so I have laid aside my sewing. . . .

. . . About that piece of land, I was quite anxious James should get it. I thought he could improve it with less *back-bone* than he could this. But that he could not do just now unless he had assistance. Then we thought you might like to invest for yourself or lend to him being secured. . . . Land seems to be on a rise. Emigration seems to be setting in this Spring, and choice pieces of land are being picked up. That is certainly a nice location, the nearest to us of any we can get hold of. James proposed that I borrow some money of Mr. Crosier [a brother-in-law] and buy it myself. I confess I feel a little diffident about not asking him or you for so much money. There is a man stands ready to take it if none of us get hold of it.

I must not neglect to tell you that I have got a sewing machine, and I am almost like the man with the Elephant, when he got it he did not know what to do with it, I have got so I can sew some, but not to drive business much yet. . . . Louis has got so he can walk. . . . There is a beautiful building place on that 80, and if you say so we will set out some trees and have it ready. There were lively times in town last week, the veteran soildiers returning. I do not know whether one town will fill the quota this time or not. If not it will be the first time. . . . Good night. H. Jane Kelsey

“Just imagine yourself as far out to land as this, think how welcome would be any thing from your old home.”

Cottage Home, Jan. 1865

Dear Brother and Sister

Last week brought a letter from Pekin, as welcome as ever. I like to get letters from any place very much, but somehow a letter from home. Well, I can't express myself. Just imagine yourself as far out to land as this, think how welcome would be any thing from your old home. I see by your letter that you keep up the old custom of a Walnut crack on Christmas and New Year's evening. . . . We have no walnuts or not very many, but hickory nuts and hazelnuts are a very good substitute. . . . Oh we are having a bitter cold night. I think the morning must be pretty low. It is very possible it might be a little colder if the Thermometer was a little longer. . . . We have had very little snow this winter, scacely any “to speak on” nor to ride on. Orendo, what would you take for that 80 over south — in Cash? or what would you take half Cash and the balance at six per cent? Would you take \$1000? Or nine hundred

“Oh we are having a bitter cold night. . . . It is very possible it might be a little colder if the Thermometer was a little longer.”

and fifty and say nothing about the Road. Would you sell it all? Would you sell it to me if I wished to buy? James has offered this place for sale reserving about 24 acres of the best part of the timber. He has not as much cleaned land as he wants. He thought he had rather make a farm on the Prairie than to make any more here. I like the location of that, like the neighborhood in general very well. . . . James has been trying to get an organization to raise a fund in the township to buy substitutes. . . . They think by offering a pretty

good bounty they can get volunteers enough. They think their quota will not be more than three or four, and I should wish it might be less, that affirs might so shape that even that will not be needed. Orendo we have a nice frame for your picture and have stationed you on the west wall of the Parlor. I have to stop & take a look whenever I go into the room, and sometimes ere I am aware of it I find myself listening to hear you speak. . . . The children have read those little books till they are all nearly committed to memory — Jane.

Clinton [Township], March 12. 1865

Dear Bro

. . . I have sketched and sent to you Robinsons land [near Vinton in Benton County]. . . . There is no road running directly to it but I think there would not be much difficulty in getting a road on the west line if Mr Hiles does not move up there or some other *Knownothing*. . . . Now you and Robinson has me in rather a sharp corner. If you were both strangers and as the fellow said when he saw the snake and fish Hawk fighting that he did not care which whipped it would not be hard to answer! Now I will say this. That it is a good piece of Land situated in a good neighborhood and one of the best farming counties in the state! well watered. Now you and R. must make your own trades. As to the Taxes they have all been paid and the Title is from Uncle Sam to Robinson and I think perfectly good unless Jef Davis moves up here which I think rather uneventfful. . . . More Soon, Jas. C. Kelsey

Cottage Home, Sept. 3rd/65

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . The School concluded to hold a picnic, or rather a Soldier's greeting, as a good many young men had returned from the Army. According to appointment we gathered in the Grove opposite our house a week ago yesterday. . . . One hundred and thirty one took dinner, old and young. . . . Our dinner was nice and plentiful. We had two swings and a large flag. Some as good singing as we country folks could raise. The young folks played to suit themselves, &c. The little boys had a drum. A few stayed till evening. The swing still hung

there, so Mr. Albrights folks, sent out word and a crowd of young folks came on wednesday evening and had another swing. It was a beautiful moonlight evening, as comfortable as could be after a hot day, and we all enjoyed it hugely.

Our County is contemplating a Soldier's Welcome at Cedar Rapids on the seventh of this month. The soldiers are all to be out on parade and furnished with a good dinner, I hardly know whether to go myself or not. I suppose it will be a hard days work. Yesterday we were at threshing and that you know is a busy time of year. They will probably finish tomorrow in the forenoon, all that we will thrash now. James wants to get the rye threshed by flail if possible, as the straw thus saved will be worth more than the rye. . . .



. . . This is thursday, the day for the Grand Jubilee. . . . Some \$2000[?] have been expended for fire works this evening, and Music to Spice. You may judge from that what the day was to have been. They had a floral Arch with appropriate Mottoes some 40 or 50 feet in heighth, to be erected over Iowa Avenue. . . . But the day is spoiled . . . too much rain has fallen already to make it pleasant. . . .

. . . Evening — Well we ate a part of our Chicken pie at dinner &c. . . . I *wish* you could come and eat melons with us. I should just like to treat you to good Iowa Melon. James says he ought to write some to you but his right forefinger is very sore. He blistered it shovel-

“The children have some kittens at the Barn (the first we have ever had) and they take solid comfort, I mean the children do. I have my doubts about the kittens being so comfortable.”

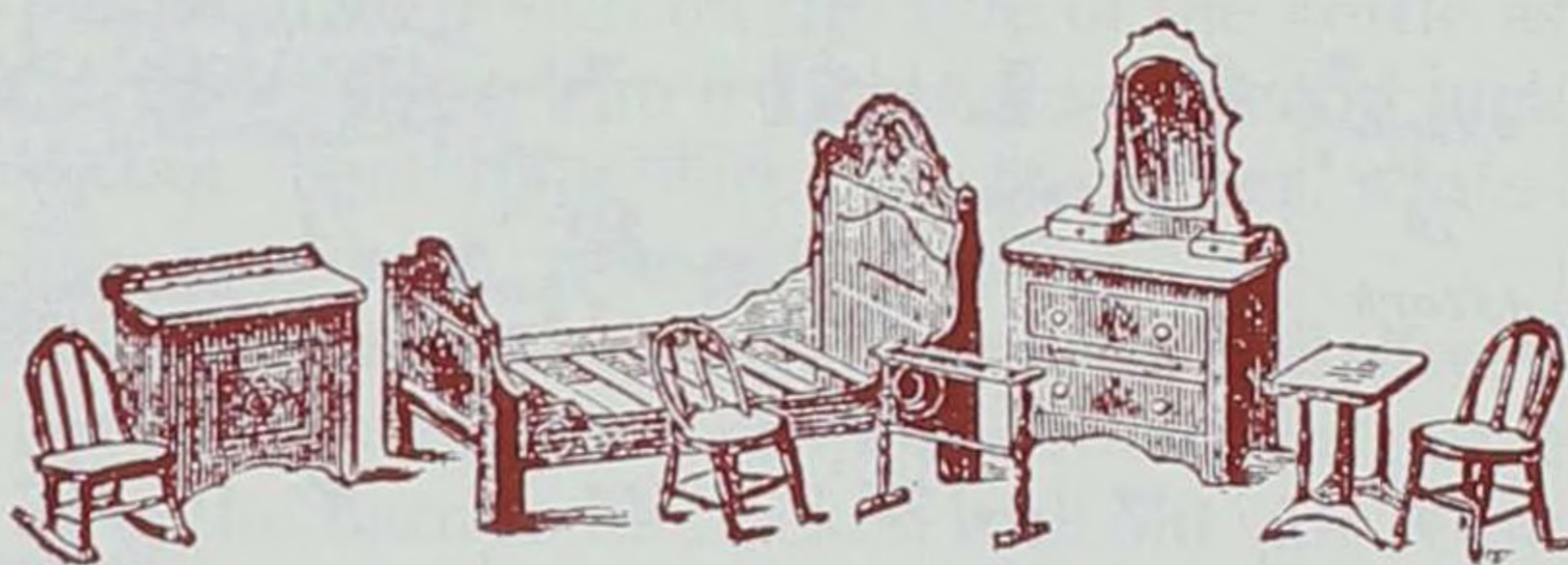
ing grain last saturday evening, took cold in it, and he has had a bad finger. Half-past nine and they are all in bed but your humble servant. Yes, Mary I know all about writing and rocking the cradle with one foot. I was about to say there was no kind of work but what I had done in connection with it. But I will except laying up fence. I am sorry your fruit is such a failure. . . . Our orchard is not bearing so well as last year, but the crops of grain were all good. . . . I have nearly a half bushels of dried sweet corn. Tell Myron and Willie if they will be out here soon they can have all the fun they want gathering hazel nuts and hickory nuts, and then they can play with the kittens. The children have some kittens at the Barn (the first we have ever had) and they take solid comfort, I mean the children do. I have my doubts about the kittens being so comfortable. . . . H.J. Kelsey . . .

IN JANE'S CONTINUING EFFORTS to persuade her relatives to move to Iowa, she disproved a later stereotype about pioneer farm women by demonstrating knowledge of the business aspects of farming. (James seemed to recognize this know-how and considered her advice.) She offered William and Mary detailed advice about what to bring if they move to Iowa. She also warned them not to bring any thistle seeds by accident. Many of what we now consider weeds in Iowa arrived during nineteenth-century settlement. (William and Mary did purchase and hold land just south of Kelseys', but they stayed in New York.)

Cedar Rapids had grown considerably since its founding in 1841. With a population

approaching six thousand by 1870, the town attracted popular lecturers such as Anna Dickinson on women's rights and James Gough on temperance.

The attempt to drill an oil well in Cedar Rapids is confirmed in the August 7, 1865, *Cedar Valley Times*.



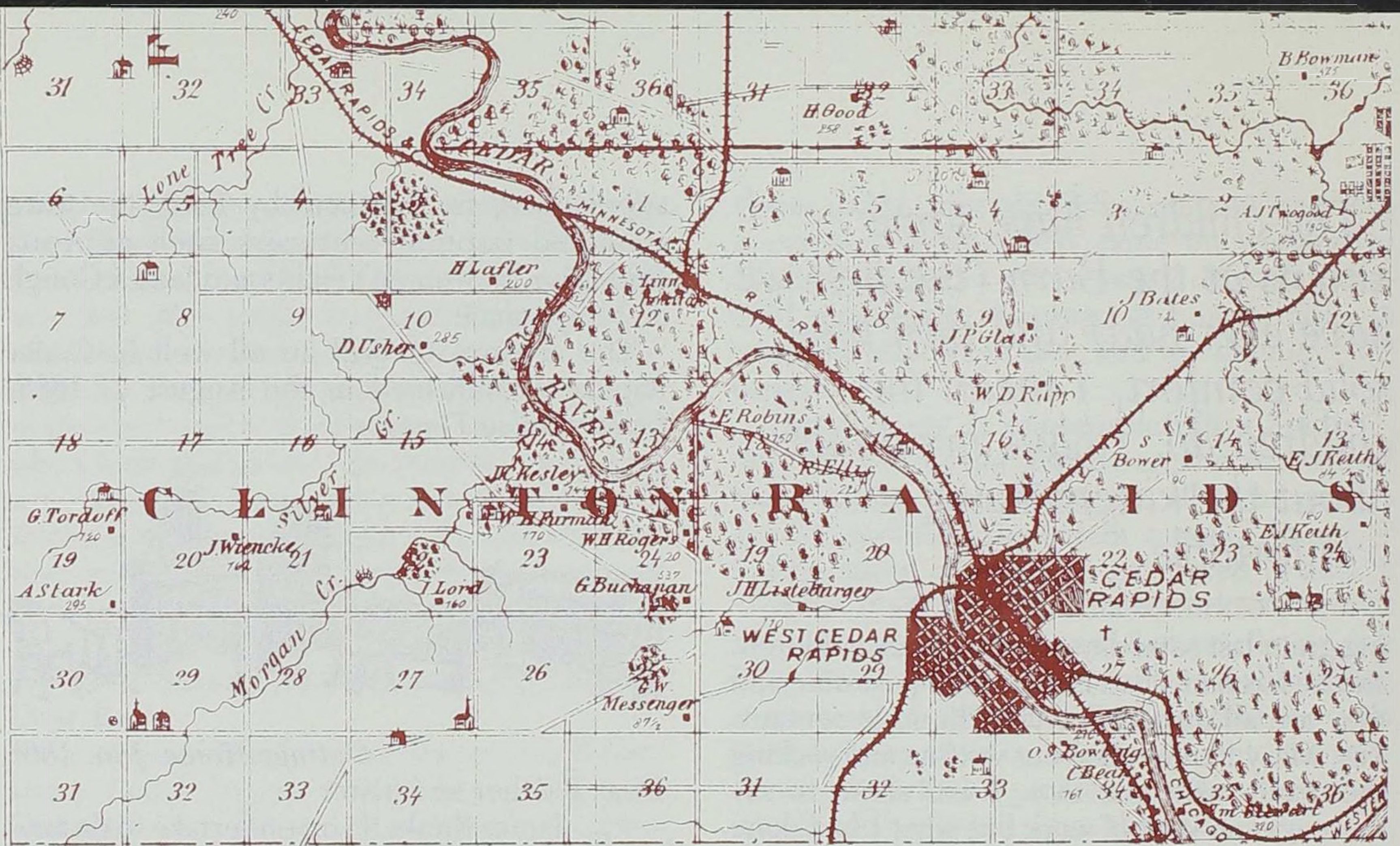
Cottage Home, Jan. 1866

Dear Brother and Sister

. . . James thinks if you undertake to do anything you ought to be here by the middle of March or *in March* at most so you can get your arrangements made ready to commence work. . . . Yes, there are several spinning wheels within the circle of my acquaintances. If you have a good head you can tuck it in somewhere, and then you will have it. I do not know the price of wheels. “What furniture would it pay to bring.” Bring Bureaus, tables, stands, clocks if good — Looking glasses. Bedsteads range here five dollars and upwards, chairs five dollars and upwards. Good lumber wagons, thimble skein—\$130. Beds, bedding, clothing, yarn, rolls, dried fruit, dishes &c. &c. can all be packed in with your furniture. James says bring a good supply of boots and shoes. Leather is very high in St. Louis. He says if you want to know the size he wears you can find his measure on Bill Kelsey's book of 1864. I am wearing a plain calf skin shoe at \$3.

By the way, dry your beef, Hams, &c. Make

“Beds, bedding, clothing, yarn, rolls, dried fruit, dishes &c. &c. can all be packed in with your furniture. James says bring a good supply of boots and shoes. Leather is very high in St. Louis.”



The Kelsey farm (misspelled “Kesley”) appears as wooded land in Section 14 of Clinton Township in this 1875 Linn County map. As late as the 1930s, this area along the Cedar River was still referred to as “Kelsey’s Bend.”

your soap into Hand soap. If you pack any thing in straw, James says look and not bring any thistles, for your own good as well as others. Perhaps it would be a little saving to bring a *good supply* of groceries. They ask for a good set of plain double harness from \$30 to \$40. Cows from 30 to 50\$. Horses, good \$300-\$400. Bring Grain sacks if you have them. They are a dollar a piece here. . . .

. . . The Oil well below here has caved in. They must either abandon it or commence again. James killed his Pork and beef last week. Sausage not yet made. We had some head cheese for tea. . . . I will have to send a little blank paper for it is late and I am somewhat tired. It is quite contrary to my regulations however to send any paper that is not blacked over with something, if it is no more than the dust off the table. . . . H. J. Kelsey

Cottage Home, May 20, 1866

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . A family of our acquaintance left here last week for Missouri, promised to write and give their opinion of the country. Think the soil and water of this country are hard to beat, but they hoped to find a place with nearly as good advantages and less *severe winters*. They

owned the second farm east of yours, sold for \$30, per acre. About 100 acres under the plow. A large Brick house but no barn nor orchard. . . .

I went past the corner of your 80 last week. The fence looks nice indeed, the handsomest I have seen. The posts were pronounced by every one to be the best lot of posts ever strung on the prairie. When James bargained for the lumber he engaged the right of sorting himself, so he put out all the shaky boards. Mr. Weed got some in the Spring and thought he had done nobly, got it for a dollar a thousand cheaper than James did, but when they came to put up their fences side by side, James had a superior lot of lumber. He has used his best endeavor to make a good substantial fence, had the posts sawed a given length and sorted so that the top is smooth, and looks quite tasty. . . . Now Orendo, you think the improvements have been expensive. I saw that from the beginning, but I flattered myself that if we did not buy it, that you would occupy it yourself and there would be that much in readiness for you. James has not made a move in the matter without consulting me, so whatever blame is attached, I must bear my portion. “What do you think Orendo would say to such a

move, or do in such a case,["] he would say to me, "come give your opinion, so I shall not have to father all the blame." I consented to all except sending for the last Draft. I hoped he could get the fence up without calling for any more means. . . . I feel as jealous of your rights as of my own. He will probably send a bill [for the fence] some time. We take the Cedar Valley Times again and I will send you a copy occasionally so you can see How the R Roads &c. are progressing. I think there are some 1500 men at work between here and Vinton. Now I must get tea. Accept the best wishes of sister, Jane

"You can see How the R Roads &c. are progressing. I think there are some 1500 men at work between here and Vinton."

Cottage Home, Sept. 9/66

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . You speak of laying labor and care aside and resting. How thankful I often feel that there is such a day. Though Sunday is a busy day, I have cares and duties, yet they are, or seem different from the cares of the week, and there comes a calmness over my spirits unannoyed by the busy scenes of the week. . . .

We have had a good deal of rainy weather since harvest commenced, but most of men succeeded in getting their grain stacked in tolerable good condition, and thrashing com-



menced a week ago last tuesday. All hands went over to your 80, and thrashed out 4 nice stacks, 316½ bushels. It kept two teams busy hauling the wheat home. I sent their dinner to them, a washtub full of dishes, bread, butter, potatoes, pies &c., then my large stone kettle, that will hold a pailfull and a half, full of veal potpie. The dough on the side of the kettle as our Mother used to fix it. Had very good luck with it. Then they were here to supper, whitefish, succotash, pumpkin pies &c.

They moved the machine over here to thresh out the rest of James crop. He could not put it all in the Barn so he stacked it all out side. One of winter wheat and four of Oats. . . . The grain was some wet, had about 400 bushels of Oats. He made some extra bins alongside the bay on the barn floor, has shoveled them from them to the barn floor and back again trying to dry them and not have them spoil. . . . James has been down with a couple of loads of Spring wheat from the prairie and it is called the best wheat that comes into Market, says there is a great deal of musty wheat coming in. . . .

Monday 8 O'Clock P.M. This has been one of the rainy days of the season. . . . I did the washing, packing the white clothes in a tub, and hanging the others under shelter. Since that I have nearly made two aprons for myself. &c. The girls hemmed a sheet and the bottoms of two shirts for the boys. Ettie can hem quite well for the little practice she has had. It was too rainy for them to go to school. While I washed they took possession of the parlor, keeping house, visiting, reading &c. One had some shawls pinned around the table for a house, another raised the Umbrella and set some chairs around it, a pillow case spread over the Ottoman. Oh, and various other fixings 'twould make you laugh to see them. They are quite engaged reading their Testaments. Ettie read nearly half of the book of Matthew today. . . .

There was a festival at the new Church on the corner south of your 80 . . . to raise funds to help finish the inside. It is enclosed and roofed and I guess the floor laid. I sent a large loaf cake and four pies for the supper. They took in about \$160. Had a very good time I understand.

. . . I wish you were here tonight. I feel like

talking till 12 or 2 O'Clock again. All are in bed and asleep but myself, and the Katydid's are making merry outside. . . . Good night from Your Sister Jane

"I wish you were here tonight. I feel like talking till 12 or 2 O'Clock again. All are in bed and asleep but myself, and the Katydid's are making merry outside."

Cottage Home, Feb. 1st, 1868

Dear Brother and Sister —

. . . A denomination called Evangelists are preaching here about once in two weeks. They have appointed a protracted meeting for this place to commence the next time they come around. Last Saturday and Sunday was our Second Quarterly for this year, held at the Church. . . . We went over Sunday morning, had an interesting Love-feast [communion]. The Elder's sermon was comforting and encouraging. . . . We closed our S. School at the school house about the first of Nov. Soon after the school at the church was reorganized, it having died out during the summer, and I was set over a class of little boys and girls. Mr. Heaton has been elected Super't and he is talking of a change, assigning me a class of young ladies. . . . The Church is nearly completed except the painting. The Speaker's platform is carpeted. There is a debt yet on the first building of the house. We had a Festival in Nov., cleared over \$90. during the evening the

"The Church is nearly completed except the painting. . . . We had a Festival in Nov., cleared over \$90. during the evening the minister collected enough to purchase a Bible."

minister collected enough to purchase a Bible for the house. . . .

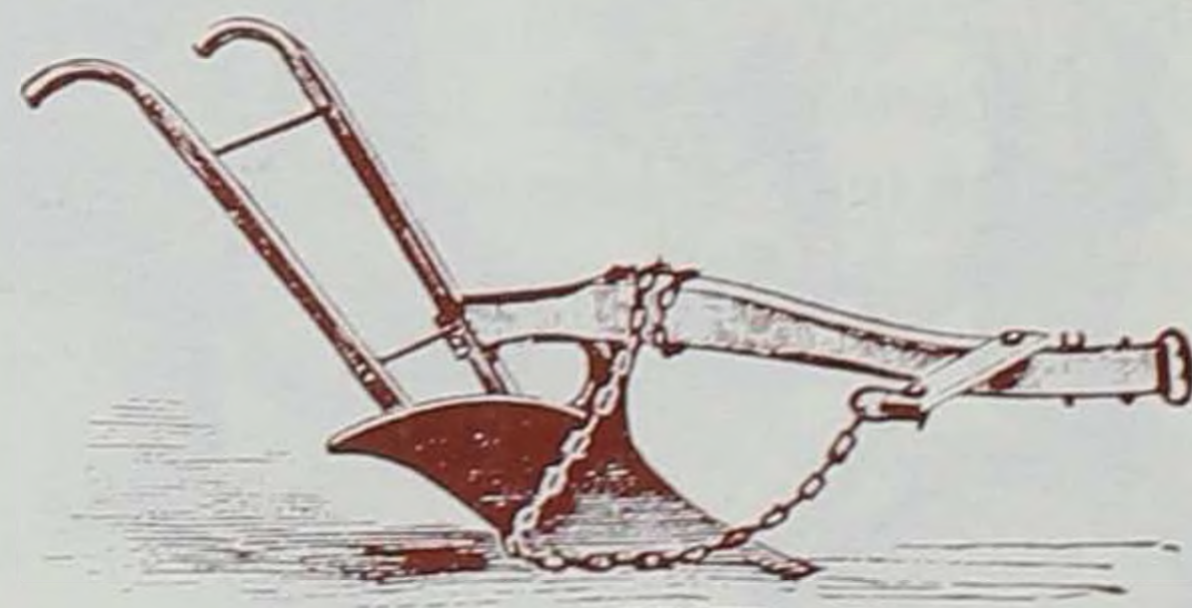
. . . It was for ourselves that James thought of buying the 80. For some reason we thought we would move if all could be brought about satisfactorily. There is a better state of society, and we would be nearer the church, &c. . . . Taxes are higher than ever before. The papers report the state out of Debt and money in the treasury, if such be the case I am in hope, taxes will settle a little after awhile. . . . Last fall after the growth of the season was over, James explored the woods on this and the other side of the river, got quite a collection of young trees, set out. . . . The east end is filled up entirely, Cotton wood, Maple, Ash, Elm, Oak, Wauhoo, Willow, Plum, Butternut, Prickly Ash, &c. If they live and grow, will make quite a show. Last Spring he put out a few Currant and Goose berry bushes near the fence, so as not to interfere with plowing.

. . . The cisterns are both dry and the wells are nearly so. . . . We have not had snow enough to make sleighing. . . .

The churches in the Rapids are all having good revivals. . . . Mrs. Albright says there seems to be no abating of the interest. . . . Mr. Gough has lectured in C. Rapids this winter also Miss Ann Dickinson. . . . Your Sister Jane

THROUGHOUT THE 1870s the Kelseys continued to prosper. Their farm was valued at six thousand dollars. They purchased more horse-drawn equipment, such as sulky plows.

Jane wrote more and more about religion and her church work. As her children matured, she had more time to devote to her religion. Her own health problems may also explain this focus. In June 1873 the "Great National Camp Meeting" was a large ten-day Methodist revival at the Cedar Rapids fairgrounds. Methodist ministers from across the nation spoke at the three daily services.



“As we might be called upon to display our Musical talent we thought it best to shine up a little. We spent about an hour in singing when the time for preaching arrived as we run our school on sharp time.”

Cedar Rapids, June 30, 1872

Dear Bro

Although it is Sabbath day & we had no preaching at the school house it would not be amiss to write a few lines to you. We are all well at present and attended Church to day. Jane, Myself, Ida, Ada & Louis went in the Buggy. Hiky & Ettie on Horseback. Johny & Eric on the Mules so you see we had quite a Train. & Also quite a Rain. We met at church at 9 o'clock in order to tune our Hearts and voices preparatory to the fourth of July. They intend having a Sabbath school celebration at Sicileys [Sisley] Grove on the Fourth. Our school is invited and as we might be called upon to display our Musical talent we thought it best to shine up a little. We spent about an hour in singing when the time for preaching arrived as we run our school on sharp time. . . . Our preachers Name is O. D. Bowles. We think him a good Man. We have a good school, the interest is increasing. Ours is one of those schools that does not winter Kill. We have two Bible Classes, five intermediate Classes and one infant Class. Jane has charge of the female Bible Class. . . . To day I had 12 in my Class, all bright Eyed Young Boys. . . . Jane and Myself were delegates to the county Sabbath school convention at Zardas Grove. . . . Jane made a speech.

. . . I had intended Making out the account between us but will not do it at this time. It is rather a difficult task. I have some grain on hand that belongs to you. The roads were very bad in the spring and I could not move it. . . . We had a good time generally on the fourth. But I will leave that for Jane as she is better at drawing pictures than I am. . . . Yours truly, Jas. C. Kelsey . . .

July 2nd, 1872

Dear Brother & Sister —

. . . Ettie does not go to school this summer, so I have her help which is often times quite a relief. I think I can endure much more than I could last summer. . . . Jane
To morrow, Ettie will be 15 years old. I am fixing that embroidered muslin dress I used to wear, so she will wear it some. She has put ten little tucks in the skirt. . . .

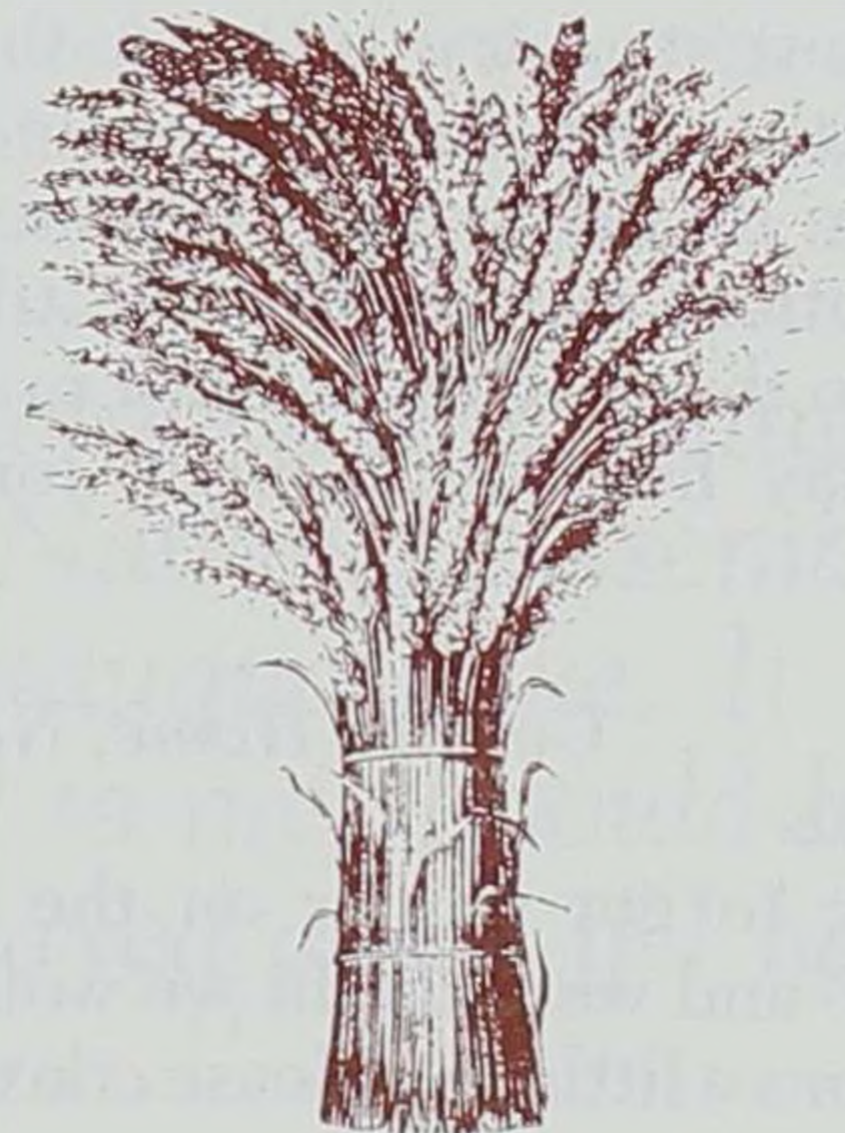
Cottage Home, Sept. 1st at evening [1872?]

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . I have the Superintendency of the [Sunday] school this summer, and try to teach the Bible Class also. It makes much for me to do. It fills up my leisure hours (or moments I should have said for such hours I have not), gives me subjects for thought constantly, as well as occasion for much watchfulness and prayer. It is not altogether unprofitable for me. To what extent it will benefit others time will determine. There have been at times discouraging circumstances connected with the school. . . . I can hardly do the reading and study I think necessary to fit me for my station or enable me to meet my responsibilities. The girls have got so they can help me some by hunting out references. They can quite readily find almost any passage I name to them. . . .

Tuesday evening. . . . Our Strawberry Corn is nearly all ripe enough for seed. . . . At the time it had been planted 7 weeks it was 7 feet high, and very clean and well tilled. It was the pride of the whole country. It will now average about 10 feet, and looks from the road to be pretty well eared. . . .

. . . Friday, 13th I will pause a little in my



“Johnnie has gone after hazelnuts, Hokie is gathering seed corn. Eric and Louis are jobbing, the girls are up in their room making artificials out of corn husks.”

labors to jot a little. . . . James is sitting on his sulky plow watching the horses work. . . . Next week intends going to the prairie to plow. His thrashing is done on the prairie but not at home. Wheat was not near as good a crop this year as was thought. Some pieces of new breaking only turned ten bushels per acre. I think James said yours was about sixteen per acre. Johnnie has gone after hazelnuts, Hokie is gathering seed corn. Eric and Louis are jobbing, the girls are up in their room making artificials out of corn husks. . . .

. . . The last day of our summer school the children had a picnic in our Grove. There were between 40 and 50 pupils present. They did their speaking and reading of Compositions after their dinner and then they enjoyed the swinging.

Sat. Morn. I can probably send this to town this after noon so I will close my journal. I am not a Spiritualist nor a great believer in dreams, but I have a presentment of sad news from a distance. I think some of my friends are sick. . . . My head and eyes trouble me very much this fall. I sometimes am at a loss to conjecture how I am to get the knitting and sewing done necessary to make us comfortable for the winter. But I do not want to borrow trouble about it. I try to trust that I shall have strength given in time of need. It has proved thus in years past. I sometimes get almost impatient, can hardly wait till the girls are grown so they can do it, but I pray that my strength may hold out a little longer. . . . H.J.K. . . .

Cottage Home, Nov. 8th/72

Dear Friends

We think to get dinner on the 16th (our anniversary) and we thought we would extend our invitations a little. So please consider your-

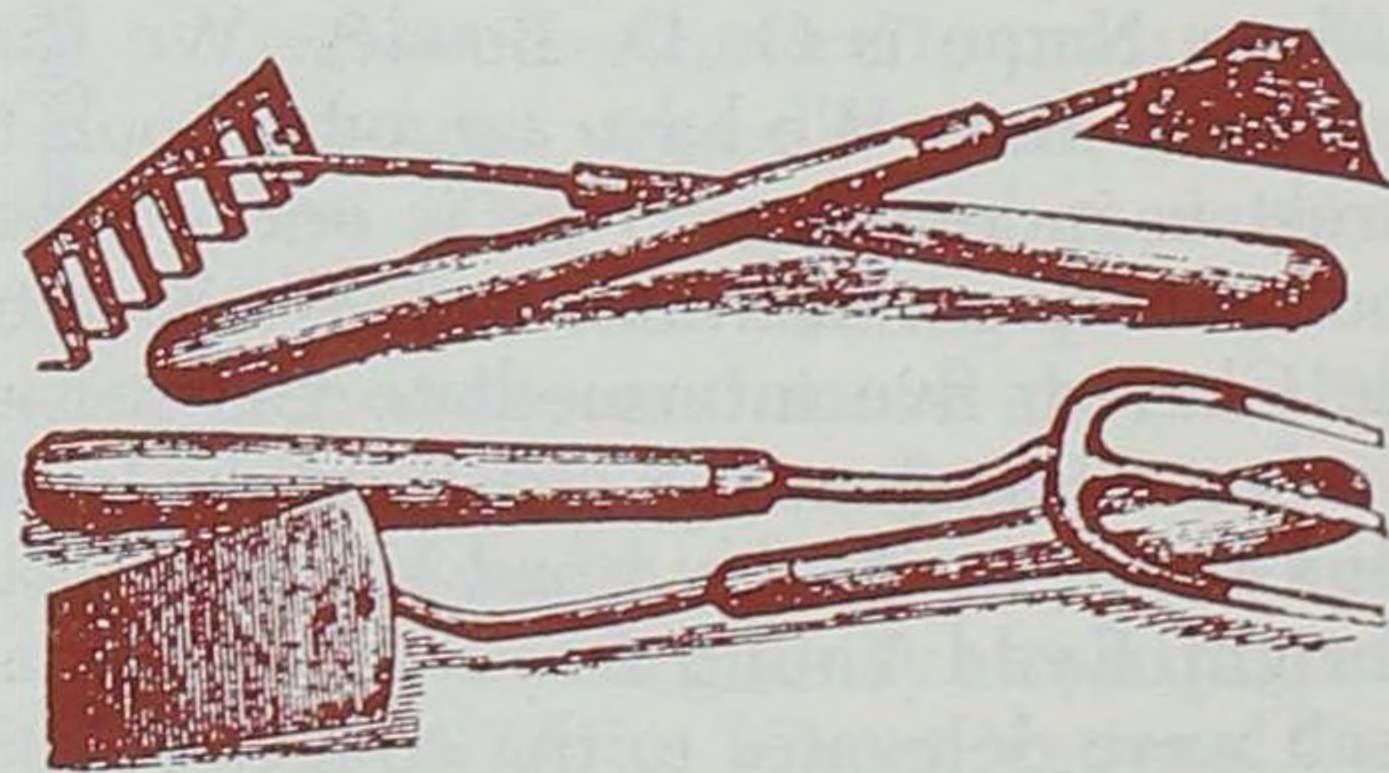
selves invited, all of you “from grandfather down to little” May, and Charlie & Elmer and Uncles James and Luther and *all*. Now did you ever see a note of invitation written after that sort! Well, it is western I guess. . . . Excuse me for not giving you a little longer notice, but a good deal of work and some sick days keep me from doing just as I would like. I did not get up yesterday till about 3 O’clock. My head and eyes as usual. . . . All I did yesterday was to wash my face and comb my head. . . . Yours as ever — H.J. Kelsey

James felt so bad when the letter from Maryett [Jane’s sister] came giving her reason for not going east, he had a long cry over it. He said he could not help it. He wrote her immediately that if she had written it sooner she should not have lacked for means. . . .

Cedar Rapids, June 22d, 1873

My Dear Uncle

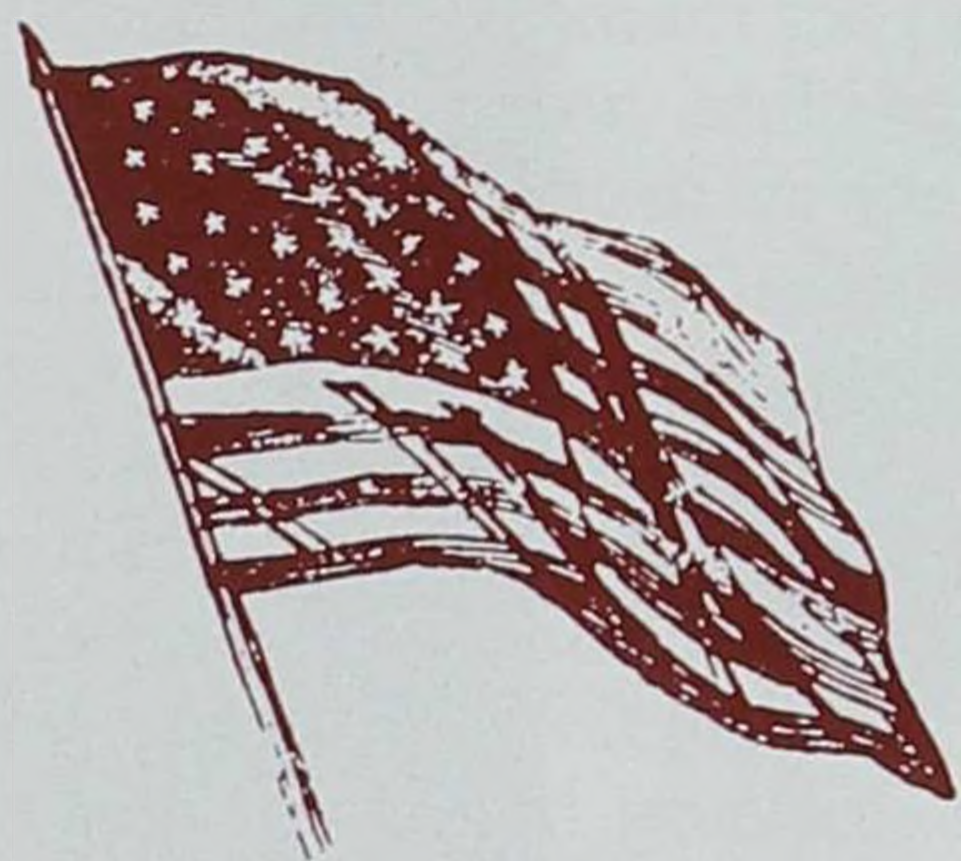
As Ma was writing I thought I would write a little and tell you how things are getting along out here. . . . Well if you remember those quinces you gave Ma last fall she brought them home and saved the seed, and this spring we sowed them and they came up and are quite large and those grafts, Pa buried them last fall and this spring he had them grafted and three of them are coming nicely. . . . Last Friday



after I got home from school I had a knife and went to split a piece of wood . . . and the knife went right through the wood and a little farther it went through my finger too. It has got better now. Ma thinks it went between two of the cords. It is a little stiff now but I think it will get over that soon.

I go to school this summer. Our teachers name is Miss Klumph, quite a funny name I think dont you? I study History, 3d Part of

Arithmetic. I am over to Analysis in that. Orthography, Mcnalleys large Geography, Pineoes Grammar, and Spelling. I like to go to school pretty well. We are not raising many chickens this summer but we have four little ducks. We had nine but the rats carried off five of them. . . . There is a going to be a great celebration at Marion on the fourth of July.



There is a man going to walk the rope. The Grange club that has the greatest display shall get a large banner. . . . From your Niece Ada Kelsey

Ada writes of their studies at school. They are simply reviewing what they have been over. They went about half way through their Algebra last winter. The teacher this summer could not take them any farther nor teach algebra at all, so they are perfecting what they have. I do not know what they will do next winter if we do not have a higher grade of teacher. They will have to stay at home, some of them, for we can't send four away to school yet, and I do not know as we can any. Oh, I have so much crowding into my mind that I do not know where to break my thread off. We put out a large orchard this spring, but I think the severe winter had injured some of them. And some of the old trees seem to be dying, giving the orchard a ragged appearance. I think there were over 400 new trees. . . . [From Jane]

Cottage Home, June 22, 1873

Dear Brother & Sister

. . . You have heard something of us, I presume, by the way of [my] bro. James. He rather surprised us at his coming. . . .

. . . O, how I would like to sit down a little while and chat. . . . My mind steps over to the other side to what will probably be our next family re union. That meeting in the morning. My whole being thrills with the thought. . . . We have been making arrangements to go [to "the great national Campmeeting"], have our cloth for a tent, three families. . . . We got word yesterday that we could have no fire to make our tea or cook our potatoes, we must go to the eating house and pay for it. . . . If we cannot take a stove I do not know as we shall go much. . . . We attend the [Christian Union] Church and then help these here all we can the balance of the time. I suggested and we have instituted and kept up a female prayer meeting, for the benefit of the sisters, and they are growing there by. I wanted if possible to keep them faithful and become well established. Some are like little children learning to walk. They have some strength but they do not know how to use it. Others are like an individual recovering from a long serious illness. . . . These all want help and they are reaching out their hands and looking to me. Their conversion or their reclamation was in answer to prayer. The Lord gave them to me, and I feel in duty bound to make the way as plain and smooth for them as I can. I do enjoy helping them. From sister Jane. . . .

Cottage Home, Iowa, June 13th, 1875

Dear Brother and Sister —

. . . My eyes and head have been so bad the last two weeks that I have given up all general reading. I study my S.S. lesson a very little, and read a little in the Bible. . . . I am hoping, by being careful, to get the better of it, for it is unpleasant to have such a pain day and night, to say nothing of the self-denial it takes to keep me from reading, and knitting is just as bad, I

"You wrote about being at the Great National Assembly at Chatauqua Lake. It seemed to me, I could hardly have stayed away if I had been very near."



Ettie Annorah Kelsey, eldest daughter of Harriet and James Kelsey

have so many to knit for. I will not complain, the Good Father will make it all right to me. . . .

You wrote about being at the Great National Assembly at Chatauqua Lake. It seemed to me, I could hardly have stayed away if I had been very near. . . . I was at the District Convention at Belle Plaine last winter. That was indeed a feast. All talented speakers, and so many, which kept the variety good. . . . Our old wood-house gave way under the pressure of a body of snow last winter, and we must do some thing in the room of it, so we are fixing the house a little. This added to the general spring's work. . . . Ettie is in Mt. Vernon, will be home in two weeks. I think perhaps she may be able to help herself somewhat. Ida says she wants to take music, so she can teach that. We hardly knew how to afford it just yet. By home instruction and study and practice, she plays quite readily. . . . Louis goes to school, Eric a part of the time. Ida and Ada are not trying to go to school this summer. I find I have none too much help with them here. Good bye from Jane.

Eric says "send my best respects."

Cottage Home, Iowa, April 20th, 1877

Dear Brother and Sister

I am alone today and thought I would write some this afternoon. James, Hieke and Eric are at work on the prairie, Ida and Ada went with them as far as they went. . . . Louis is in school. Ettie is teaching in the second district west of this.

. . . I was pretty sick a few days a little before Christmas, was a long time getting a little strength . . . can not endure very much labor or fatigue though I feel pretty well, growing old, don't you think?

. . . We had something of a revival in our church last winter, a few additions. . . . It was not what I wanted to see, in its extent and power, but I am thankful for so much. . . . Mr. Heaton is our supt. for the coming year. His first move was to put all the Married ladies and all the adult gentlemen in one class. Then ask them who they would have for a teacher. Mrs. Kelsey unanimous, so you see I have something to do. . . .

. . . Our Missionary Society is retaining its

"We are very much encouraged from what we learn from India and Japan. The Gospel is taking hold on the people of those countries and China."

interest. . . . The Sisters put me in the Presidential chair for another year. They said they knew I was not strong but they could not spare me, and they would have to hold up my hands as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands. . . . We are very much encouraged from what we learn from India and Japan. The Gospel is taking hold on the people of those countries and China and *now* the same amount of money accomplishes more in those countries than in our own.

Louis is here from school and I must kindle the fire before long. The men folks like to have supper ready when they get home. . . . H.J. Kelsey

Cottage Home, Iowa, Nov. 13th, 1879

Dear Sister Mary

. . . You mentioned "the first winter storm" &c. For once the winter storms do not annoy. They can not reach that quiet resting place, that peaceful sleep can not be disturbed by *any thing* until the last morning comes, and He who gives life, shall call. O, with what a vigorous life, will he come forth! O, praise the



Lord for the hope of the just, so full of immortality. O, how much! how much! . . .

. . . All hands are at work husking Hokie's corn. They thought they might get done this week, but we have had some rainy days which hindered somewhat. But we needed the rain. Wells were dry and cisterns empty. . . . Love to all, from H.J. Kelsey

Cottage Home, Iowa, May 18th, 1881

Dear Mary

. . . A few evenings ago your kind letter came, also the Photograph. . . . Child-like I read your letter over so many times. O how wish I could sit down with you awhile, I believe it would do me good. I am alone now-a-days. Ettie is living in Clay Co. Ida and Ada are attending school. When Ettie began to talk about getting married, they thought they must give up their studies. This year would finish the course in the Collegiate Institute, but they could not leave me alone. . . . They did not go the fall term but studied what they could at home. After the wedding they went into school. Louis went also the winter term. . . .

Lida [Hokie's wife] was not sick long. Providentially Hokie and Lida were here when she was taken sick. Better for them and us. Dr. Ristime called it Hemorrhagical Peripura. The disease was altogether new to us. Dr. said they had a *few* cases. The work was rapid. I never



saw any thing like it. We miss her. O, how we do miss her! *I* do. She had been in the habit of coming often, and she always came in so cheery. The second week after she was gone I caught myself so many times thinking, It is time for Lida to come again. She seemed a little

startled when she first spoke of dying, after that calm and composed, called different ones to her, a message for each, enjoyed prayer and singing. On Monday I said to her, "do you know me?" "Yes, it's mother," and stroked my face with her hand, very soon pointing upward she said "my other mother is up there." I said "do you see her?" "Yes I do." There were times when it seemed we were just between the two worlds. She named her place of burial, selected her bearers, the garment to be laid out in, disposed of some of her things. She died the sixth of April. Hokie is staying with us, helping his father. I do not suppose he has any definite plans yet. Poor boy! He was so sad it seemed I could not look at him. Lida's infinite gain.

. . . I am taking Kidney wort. I took two boxes last year, and though I did not think I felt

"I am taking Kidney wort. I took two boxes last year . . . I found I could endure very much more than I had for years."

very much better, yet I found I could endure very much more than I had for years. . . . Our winter was beyond any thing I ever saw. So many heavy drifting snows. Railroads suffered wonderfully. At one time there were six trains snowed in at Cedar Rapids. Passengers boarded at the expense of the R.R. company. This was the case every where. Some lived in Depots, and some on the trains, some in the hotels, and any where.

. . . The Congregational and Methodist

"Our winter was beyond any thing I ever saw. So many heavy drifting snows. Railroads suffered wonderfully. At one time there were six trains snowed in at Cedar Rapids."

Ministers preach alternate sabbaths. . . . It seemed so good to all meet together. The ministers all sharing the service together, it seemed like getting toward the Millennium, the time when "the watchmen shall see eye to eye." Well we had a good meeting. The Spirit was present. You mentioned dropping all for a season of prayer. I have done that many times, and it seems I am a little nearer the throne at such times than any other. I think I get a growth beyond ordinary seasons. . . .

. . . Louis is working at the printer's business, in the Republican office. They issue 1000 weeklies and 54 quires of dailies. . . . His wages at first were \$3. per week. He gets \$4, or 4½ now. He is home only once a week. . . . Good night, from Jane



Cottage Home, Iowa, Jan. 18th, 1882

Dear Sister Mary

I have set out to write several letters this week. . . . I think I shall write one to our corresponding Secretary in Davenport, enclosing one to our orphan in Peking China whom we named Cynthia See. . . .

O, I was so glad to get your letter for several reasons. It came to me at supper time. I read it aloud to those present. When I finished, James turned to Hokie saying "that is worth more than your paper" (Toledo Blade). I thank you for remembering everybody just as you always do. It brings one *great* panoramic view before my mind, so vivid, minute and complete. I am glad



the friends have not forgotten to get together. Then my mind goes back to that other great picture which has occupied such a conspicuous place in my memory, the comings and goings, meetings and partings, when I was among the number last. Some of us will meet no more on earth. . . . We linger to do a little more, to endure a little more, to receive *more* and *more*. Can we not sometimes say "My cup runneth over —"

. . . I had a letter from bro. James last week, he represents the Freedman's Aid Society in need of much help, so they can occupy the field for usefulness more fully. There seems so much to be done and done soon, and so few to do and so little means to do with.

Thursday. Our folks intended to begin putting up ice today, but the neighbor who has the saws, had taken them into town to get sharpened, and not got them home yet, so our folks took a couple of loads of wood into town. . . . H.J. Kelsey

Cottage Home, Iowa, October 7, 1882

Dear Sister Mary

. . . In Sept. Mr. K. and Ida visited Ettie, were with her about two weeks. They made up a company of nine and went north . . . to Spirit and Okiboji lakes, tented out at night, hunted and fished, had a grand good time. . . .

This is the day for the monthly meeting of the W.F.M. Society. I bent all my energies to get my work out of the way this forenoon, so I could go this afternoon. It is nearly five miles to the place of meeting today. . . . We got a let-

"They made up a company of nine and went north . . . to Spirit and Okiboji lakes, tented out at night, hunted and fished, had a grand good time."



About 1933 some of Harriet and James Kelsey's children gathered for a photograph. From left: (standing) Louis Kelsey and Heinrich Kelsey. (Seated) John Foote (adopted son), Ida Kelsey Orton, Ada Kelsey Chamberlain.

ter from our orphan in Peking, China, with translations by her teacher. We have her photograph. All these things help the interest. . . .

Tuesday evening. I have been hard at work all day, but I will write a little this evening, for I want this ready to go to town tomorrow. They will go down with butter. Butter was thirty three cents per pound last week. It has been gradually coming up. Some think it will be very high this winter. Now if Myron is with you, tell him please write. . . . We would be glad to read his letters if we can not see his face nor hear his voice. A letter will be "reliable." A letter from you is always acceptable. I like to

hear about all the folks. It almost seems as though I was there among them. . . . My love to all the friends. I do kindly remember them,
From Jane —

THE COLLECTED LETTERS END in 1882 with the death of Mary Rogers, Jane's sister-in-law. Harriet Jane Kelsey lived until February 1900, and James until February 1903. They were buried near Cedar Rapids, in the small rural cemetery at Sisley Grove, with their daughter Louise and their stillborn son. □



NOTE ON SOURCES

Background material on the Kelsey family was found in 1878 and 1911 Linn County histories; agricultural censuses; land records at the Linn County recorder's office; Edward A. Claypool and Azalea Clizbee's *A Genealogy of the Descendants of William Kelsey*, vol. 3 (1947); and Joseph Morcombe's *History of Crescent Lodge No. 25* (1906). Major sources for the commentaries between letters were the following: Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt* (1961); Earle D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey* (1951); annual reports of the Iowa State Agricultural Society; Peter Collier, *Sorghum, Its Culture and Manufacture* (1884); Glenda Riley, *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (1981); Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (1980); Hubert H. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement* (1980); Glenna Mat-

thews, *Just a Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity* (1987); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (1979); Erling A. Erickson, *Banking in Frontier Iowa* (1971); Robert P. Swierenga, *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier* (1968); Iowa State College, *A Century of Farming in Iowa, 1846-1946* (1946); and the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, *Cedar Rapids Republican*, and *Cedar Valley Times*. The fully annotated manuscript is in the production files in the State Historical Society (Iowa City).

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