



## Letters Home

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Article Summary: Two letters from Stinzey to his wife at home recount his experiences traveling west at the time of the Gold Rush. He wrote the first letter in 1850 from Kaneshville, Iowa, and the second in 1859 from Omaha.

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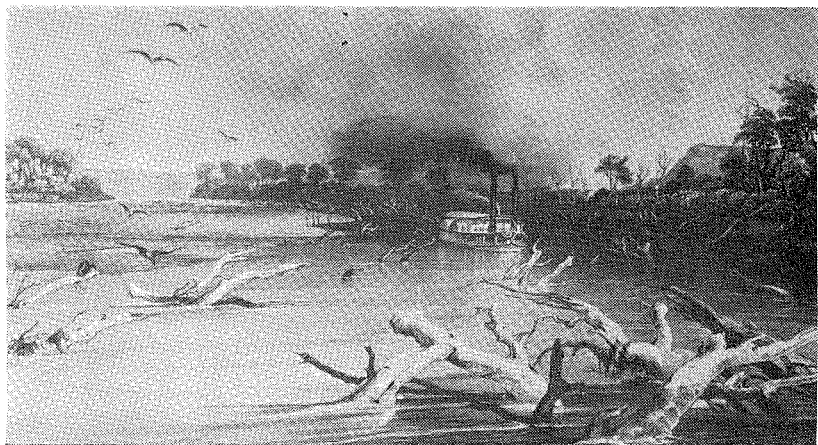
Photographs / Images: snags in the Missouri

## LETTERS HOME

*A Letter of 1850*

Kanesville, Iowa, May 12th, 1850.  
4 miles from the Council Bluff  
Landing.

My Dear Wife. You see by the date of this letter where I am but you cannot realize any more about this place than I did when perusing the letters of Henry Weld. In the first place I will tell you that I left St. Louis on the 27th of April in the Steamboat Robert Campbell for the Bluffs, and for the fourteen days past I have been on board of said boat, contending with the current of the River.—And such a current and such a river is no where else to be found on this globe, and I am pretty sure the like will not be found on any other. To talk of the Missonri river is time wasted. I have read and heard of it from many pens and many mouths and yet have known nothing of the greatness—power—and majesty of said river. I have been on her bosom only fourteen days when she has been merely playing her lullaby freaks. But such freaks as they are,—yet they are well calculated to awe the mind and subdue the spirit of man. While ascending the giant stream we encountered masses of floating timber extending as far as the eye could reach, and rushing forward to its borne with an impetuosity which was truly appalling. The floating masses of timber consisted of every thing which constituted forests above. Vast trees of great size roots & all mixed indiscriminately with brush and ordinary flood wood. These floating masses we avoided as far as possible, yet our paddle wheels were often badly fractured by coming in contact with some intrusive log, which was unwilling to yield the right of floating where his Master Missonri had pleased to send him. But what is now transpiring is nothing to what transpires when he puts on his full armor for the mighty foray. Then the spectator may behold thousands of acres of the most beautiful and fertile land, & covered with a forest more dense, and of a growth the most gigantic, whelmed in a common and utter ruin in a few days. But I have told you, and truly too, that description is tame, & insipid and although I would like to have you view and contemplate[ate] scenes of such grand and imposing character, yet I am well aware that the pen can never bring them with vividness to the mind. But I will not dwell upon the journey, or the maddened, foaming and boiling



MAXIMILIAN. PAINTING BY BODMER

### Snags in the Missouri

Missouri.—It is a mighty river, and is in the heart of a mighty Empire, and its shores will soon be teeming with a dense population, and I hope by moral & intellectual worth it will be fit and worthy to be its occupants.

The country here is sublimely beautiful, and it would do my heart good to have you see & realize as I have seen and felt this day. The Valley of the Missouri here, is six or eight miles wide, and you can see how it looks here, by imagining a vast amphitheatre, surrounded by equally vast promintories formed in a semicircle. The plane of this amphitheatre is as level and beautiful as Squaw Prairie, and more fertile if possible, and in 20 years from this time some point in this amphitheatre will be occupied by a large and flourishing city. Such is my prediction. I arrived here yesterday, the 11th of May, and relieved the anxiety of my companions, who had become tired of paying \$3.00 a bushel for corn, and other things in proportion. We are all here in fine health and spirits, and intend hauling out for the plains on the 15th and then adieu to civilization. Ere this reaches you,—your husband will be far away on the plains towards the setting sun. I have ordered the editor of the St. Joseph paper to forward three more copies of his paper to you, that you might learn through its colums of the departure of the last trains of emigrants. While in St. Joseph it snowed 2 inches deep on the deck of the steamboat iu the night, and about an hour before light in the morning, it commenced raining, and the snow left as unceremoniously as it came. There has been a vast deal of

suffering among the emigrants that came on early,—many—very many have died, and many will not be able to proceed on their way, and must return for the want of the necessary means. It has resulted more disastrous to those who came on here early than I had anticipated, although I predicted evil enough. I cannot hear anything of William McBride, or of Mr. Acker. I think they must be far below this. There is not grass enough on the plains at the present time, to keep a goat from starving to death, yet we shall proceed, having abundance of corn meal, and the horses are gay and fine as though they were kept for a gentlemen's carriage. It made me feel fine to see that the team had stood the journey so well. The boys have taken the very best care of the horses and few teams look as well as ours and none better. The sick one is well and looks as smooth as a new dime. I have not received any letter from you here as yet, although I am expecting one. I hope the next mail will bring me one. If you hear of evil reports of Indian murders, cholera, small pox, and many other fell destroyers of the human species, believe them not, without indubitable evidence of the truth. I will forewarn you beforehand, that a thousand idle tales are already afloat, and I wish that your heart may not be troubled. Remember that my life is in the hands of an Almighty God, and that no harm or evil can befall me without his permit.

Monday May 13th. The mail has just arrived and no letter from home. I am indeed sorry, but cannot help it. The mail closes in a few minutes for the East, and I must make short work. I have met with many old acquaintances from many parts of the East. Some from Allegan, Mich., and some from Kalamazoo and others from different parts of Ohio. The mustering of Californians on the frontiers, is like the marshaling of the hosts of an empire for a military invasion. In truth, we are going out by bands, with all the materials for offence and defence. I will have a few lines prepared to drop in the Post Office as we leave this place.

from your husband J. H. McBride.

*A Letter of 1859*

Omaha, Sunday, May 15th, 1859.

My dear Lue [Lou?] & Willie:

We are camped in this town and near the Missouri River. We arrived at Council Bluffs on the afternoon of the tenth & Bot our flour and other necessary articles, crossed to this city on Friday last. We have been resting our cattle five days, our cattle are in good condition & Pony too. We have enjoyed excellent health so far. I must tell you something about

the Stampede homewards. It reminds me very much of a cattle Stampede, if, you succeed in frightening one you frighten the whole lot & to Stop them is an impossibility. There is about 1-3 (as near as I can get at it) have Stood Still & braved the Storm out of the whole emigration including your friends and Husband. I have never in all my life Seen Such an indignant Sett of men, cursing all the Missouri River towns or the people in them threatening to fire the towns & but, So far as I can learn have cooled down to zero and are going home—feeling like dogs with their tails cut off. I have conversed with many of the returning emigrants and out of the whole number have not Seen one that Said he was at the gold diggings, the nearest that any of them have been is one who Said he was within 25 miles of the place. His Story amounts to this, two or three aaged miners Said they were returning home that the mines would not pay & he Said all the rest of the emigrants had better return home & not be Humbugged any More, that very thing has been the Means of discouraging the whole emigration. As near as we can learn & we believe it, is this, The Miners were Short of provisions & thought by turning the emigration that they could buy & Pick up things for a Mere Song, there is Many of them who Sold their provisions for a mere Song at Fort Kearney [Kearny]<sup>1</sup> and to persons going as they Said to California. Many of them told me that they Sold their flour at Fort Kearney [Kearny] for 1.50 to 2\$ per 100 lbs, Bacon for from 4 to 5 cents, and what Some of them could not Sell threw away, If we had not bot quite So Soon we could now buy for near 1-2 what the Same articles cost. There are a great many more returning via Platts-mouth which is twenty miles South of this. Cattle have been Sold for less than half what they origanlly cost. The Storm is nearly over and emigrants are begining to reason the matter more Soberly, all that are coming that I have Seen intend going through. The emigrants from the Bluffs have been crossing to this place all Morning & intend Moving forward tomorrow Morning. We Shall Start at the Same time. There will be about 30 teams leave this place for P. P.<sup>2</sup> in the morning. The first express arived at Nebraska City a few days Since bringing \$5000. dollars from P. P. I Saw an emigrant yesterday and who is going to the Peak<sup>2</sup> in the morning, Says that he has got friends out in the Boulder Mountains who are Making from 8 to 10\$ per day when he heard from them last, which, was only a Short time Since, he also told

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<sup>1</sup>The "e" had been added as early as 1859.

<sup>2</sup>Editor's Note:—Pike's Peak.

me that his friends had been working in the Cherry Creek diggings but that it did not pay well but Since they have been in the Mountains it has paid very well and the further they get up in the Mts the better it pays. It is the best thing I believe that could have happened for those that are Still going that So many have turned back, The emigration was entirely too large. Omaha is a very pretty little town, but business is very dull, Emigrants Mostly buy at the Bluffs, we got our flour for 3.75 per cent, Charlie got 57 lbs Honey, We Bot corn meal at 40 cts per Bu, corn 35 to 40, oats 30, The Indians visit us frequently but the Boys Say touch 'em not, they are unclean, an old Indian just passed our tent. There is a Saw mill about 100 yards from here twenty Pawnee Indians in it, went down & Charlie fiddled for them they appeared to enjoy it very much. They are the hardest looking Set I have ever Seen. I recd four leters from you & one from Bro. John at this place. I was So delighted & anxious to hear from you that I could not wait until I got to our tent to read them, I have Since read them over five or six times. I was realy Sory to hear that you were Sick my dear Lou [Lue?] but glad to learn that you are getting better hope that you may continue to improve in health until it shall be as good as your husband. I never had better health but it makes me feel bad & troubles me considerably to think of your Situation, oh! what a world this is, that I must be abscent from my dear wife & baby, it is very hard, If I did not think that I could do well by going I should get aboard the first boat & go home the only place of enjoyment I really have, but business is So dull at home that I think I had better go on. You wrote about me being able to get 60\$ per month if I thought to a certainty that it was So I Should now turn provided the boys were willing although I think I can do better, that is my impression at least, nevertheless I may be humbuged, at first when the crowd commenced returning they talked of going to California, if they had, I Should have returned forthwith for I could never think of being abscent from you for Such a length of time. When I left home I did not really think you were in that situation, but you ought to know. I still hope it may not be so. You also in one of your letters Say that if I think I can do well to go on & I shall go and See the other end of the Elephant, I have Seen his face and think it looks pretty well but I Should much prefer to See yours it looks much better. I Should not advise any person to go to Pikes Peak at present but I believe that there is gold there and in paying quantities. It rained all day very hard the Missouri is rising very rapidly at this point. Monday Morning it has quit raining

but Still cloudy, Shall move on Some four or five miles today & camp. I Shall write as we travel along. Shall write every opportunity. There are two mails per week to this place from Auraria City.<sup>3</sup> You will do me a great favor to write me at that point, also write one letter to Fort Larimie [Laramie]. We Shall get one or the other then. I Shall keep you advised of everything that occurs from this out. We may cross the Platte River & take the South Side at Shins Ferry but are not certain yet. Our breakfast will soon be ready. Shall finish this Missive after I have eat. Shall write a little more breakfast not ready yet. Tell Johns that I Shall write to them this Side Fort Kearney [Kearny]. Give my love to Father & Mother & Johns family allso to Grany Randall and family. Tell White that Charley can get the colour every time but dont expect to get the gold untill he gets to the Peak. I Shall Send you an Omaha paper if I can get one before we leave this town. Lu [Lou, Lue?] you must not forget your old man while he is abscent to make a little money for you & Willie. Be very careful of your health, my dear wife. Glad to learn that Willie is getting fat, Oh! that dear little fellow how I Should like to See him also his Mother the dearest of women to me Dont laugh at me for writing So, I am Sincere & you know it. This has turned out to be a warm & pleasent day. Wit is now churning Butter, it is just gathering. We Shall Start in an hour, have commenced packing up. We will go to the mines and if they pay well I Shall Stay until fall, if not I Shall return home as Soon as I am Satisfied that it wont pay. Wit Says if it dont pay he and I Shall return, the rest of the boys I cant Speak for now as they are out. I Saw two men from Farmington yesterday returning home, they were only as far as Fort Kearney [Kearny] Said they are returning because everybody is & no reasons for it. I Shall Send you a paper with letters from the mines. You can read it. My Dear Wife & Willie you will try & take care of yourself take care of your health and watch Willie So he dont fall into that cistern my love to you & all the rest, dont forget E. C. H. I Shall write frequently. I remain Ever your Aff. Husband.

I have finished this in the P. O.

E. C. Stinzey

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<sup>3</sup>Editor's Note:—Auraria City, on the west bank of Cherry Creek. St. Charles settlement on the east bank was renamed Denver and in 1860 the two settlements were consolidated.