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Article Summary: Camp traveled from Connecticut to Omaha to visit relatives and friends who had settled in the West. His journal entries and letters to his Connecticut newspaper describe a Fourth of July picnic and an expedition to pick berries.

***Scroll down for complete article.***

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Photographs / Images: Main Street of Nebraska City, 1865 (Alfred E Matthews sketch); Omaha in the 1860s

# THE JOURNAL OF JOSEPH CAMP, 1859

EDITED BY TRUMAN W. CAMP

**D**URING the summer of 1859, Joseph Camp,<sup>1</sup> a young Connecticut farmer, wished to visit his sister and her family and several other old friends who were recently settled in the Great West. During four months of travel and visiting, he compiled a fifty-page journal of his day-by-day experiences. He also sent three detailed letters to the Hartford *Daily Courant*, his local newspaper, to give the homefolks a summary of his impressions of the new and wild territory he was visiting.

On May 10, 1859 he left Hartford, Connecticut, by train; stopped over at Niagara Falls, where he noted,

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Camp (1834-1916) was born in Newington, Connecticut, a direct descendant of the earliest settlers of Wethersfield, Connecticut, and the son of Colonel Joseph Camp, a veteran of the War of 1812. Though not educated beyond the high school and very deaf, he was an avid reader of books of science, history, and religion. Soon after his return from the Western trip, he married a school-teacher, Eliza Ann Holcomb, and they reared a large family of six sons and one daughter. The family farmed about 100 acres of corn, hay, vegetables, and fruit, and raised dairy cattle, swine, and chickens in Newington until the time of his death in 1914.

*Truman W. Camp, the grandson of Joseph Camp, is professor of English at Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas. The original journal is in his possession.*

"Neither pen nor tongue can describe my emotions on seeing this stupendous work of nature"; proceeded to Chicago before crossing the Mississippi to stay for several weeks in and around Durant, Iowa, where his sister Lydia and her husband, J. B. Whittlesey, were working hard at farming. Then, on June 21, he resumed his way westward to Omaha, where he also had relatives and friends.

The portion of the *Journal* which describes the trip from Iowa to Omaha and his experiences there are reproduced with the original spelling and the rather erratic punctuation retained. At the end of each day's entry Camp usually listed his expenses and the miles he traveled by rail, water, or foot. Since his letters to the *Daily Courant* are more carefully written and give some of his impressions in more detail, they are used to supplement the main account.

21st Tuesday. Got up sick the next morning but concluded to go on. Took passage at 7 on the Steamer Wm B Ewing<sup>2</sup> for Hannibal. Crossed to Rock Island soon after where we got aground and were forced to warp off with the capstan. Started finally at 10 arrived at Muscatine at 1 where we remained until 6 discharging and receiving cargo. At 6 got under way and steamed all night with little intermission. Had a dance in the cabin in the evening. Went to bed at 10. Ex 14.10

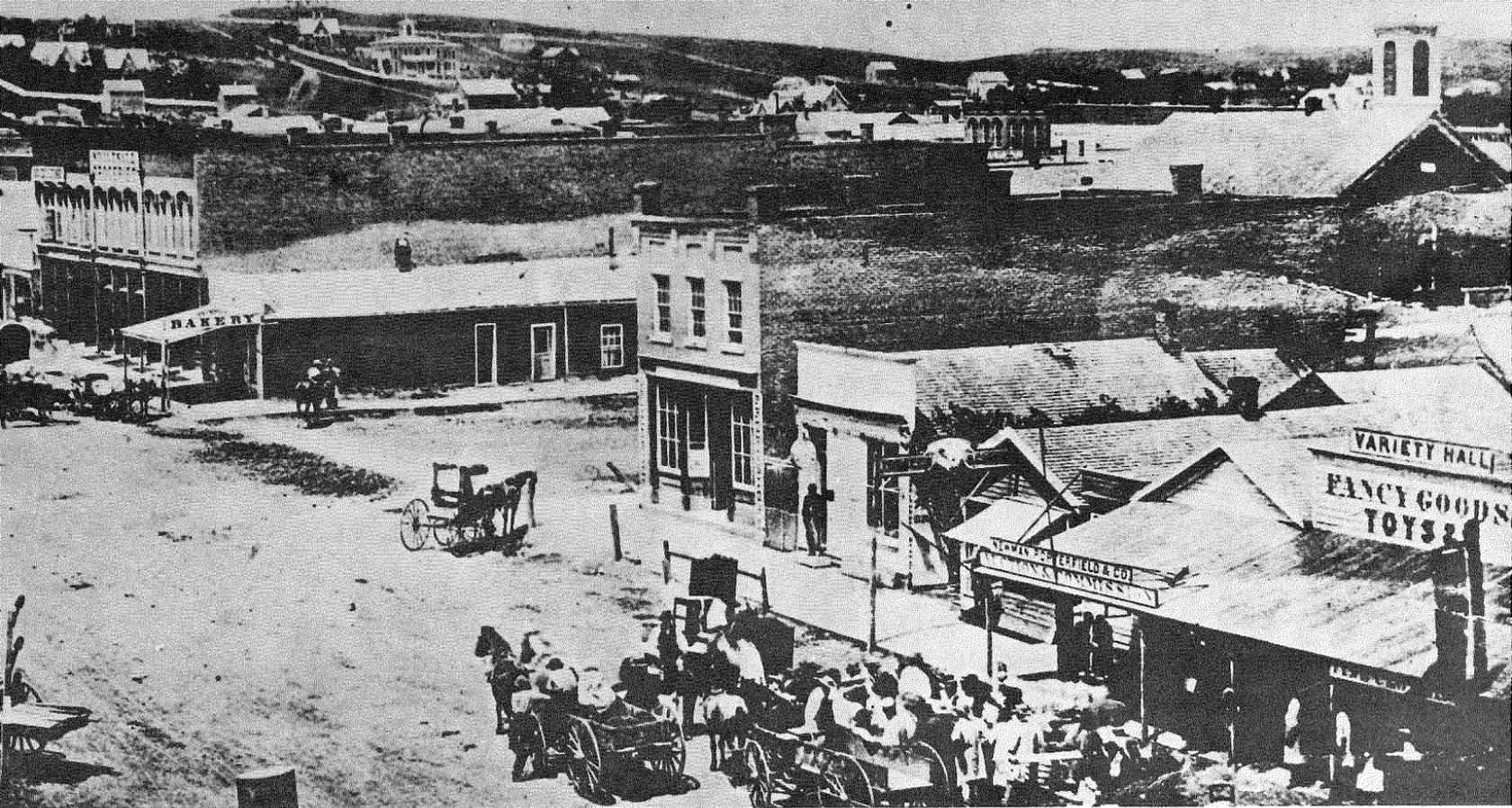
22nd Wednesday. Rose at 5 soon after which we arrived at Ft Madison. It was a beautiful day and I enjoyed the passage extremely. Made the acquaintance of Andrew H. Gorgas, bound for St Louis he promised to write to me at Newington. Passed Keokuk at 8 (which is the last town in Iowa) Quincy Ill at 12,30 and arrived at Hannibal at 2,30 at which place I debarked. Though a train started at night for St Joe I concluded to remain until next morning

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<sup>2</sup> In the second letter to the *Daily Courant*, July 11, 1859, the editor printed "Washington Erving" for "Wm. B. Ewing". The letter further reported: "The western steamers have to the unaccustomed eye a most ungainly appearance, with low decks, but little above the water, tall smoke stacks far ahead, and wheel near the stern. Though called 'floating palaces,' in nicety of finish and general appearance, I have seen none, as yet, which would stand in comparison with any first class eastern boat; still in points of convenience and general comfort they are unsurpassed—the rooms are in good style, and those on which I have been keep an excellent table."



Main Street of Nebraska City, 1865.  
(From a sketch by Alfred E. Mathews).



Omaha in the 1860's with the Territorial Capitol on the horizon.

and go through by daylight and accordingly put up at the Planters House<sup>3</sup> which is a good place. This was my first experience in a slave state and consequently my curiosity was considerably excited. Saw about 50 slaves who appeared to be in fair condition.<sup>4</sup> A gentleman from Kansas introduced himself to me on ascertaining that I was from Conn. Ex .30 160

23rd Thursday. Wrote a letter in the morning to Hud<sup>5</sup> and started soon after 10 for St Joe.<sup>6</sup> Passing through a beautiful country with alternate timber and prairies we arrived at St Joe a little before 11 on a cloudy night. Took an omnibus for Allens Hotel; but got stuck and had to take a mule wagon to get through. Went to bed in a room which I shared with 5 others. Ex 2.15 208

24th Friday. Went to the river in the morning to find a steamer for Omaha after waiting 2 hours the Steamer John D. Perry came on which I embarked and was soon after steaming up the muddy Missouri at a good rate. St Joe is the muddiest nastiest border ruffain town on the earth. It offends the eye ear and nose; with foul sights, sounds, and smells, and in fact every sense made to minister to enjoyment, is here only a avenue to pain, and is the object of foul outrage. Steamed up the River between Kansas and Missouri all day, and at night remained moored to the bank untill dawn.

Ex 10.35

25th Saturday. Made our way slowly up the river through some fine scenery, and at sundown arrived at Nebraska

<sup>3</sup> Planters House was one of the most famous of St. Louis hotels. Construction began in 1837. Charles Dickens stopped there on his American trip in 1842. The hotel was closed in 1890 but a new hotel of the same name was erected on the same site and opened in 1894. "Missouriana," *The Missouri Historical Review*, XXVII no. 3, (April 1933), p. 270n.

<sup>4</sup> "Slavery in Northern Missouri is evidently on its last legs, owing to an influx of emigrants from the free states, together with the continual travel across the state to Kansas and Nebraska, joined to the superior prosperity of the surrounding free communities; arts have caused a strong feeling in favor of freedom, and the opinion is here general that a few years more will see the extinction of slavery in Missouri, when her fine climate, fertile soil, and inexhaustible resources, will, with the omnipotent power of free labor, give her a high rank in the sisterhood of states." (*Daily Courant*, July 11, 1859).

<sup>5</sup> Hudson Stoddard of Newington, Connecticut.

<sup>6</sup> The railroad line from Hannibal to St. Joseph's had just been completed in February 1859.

City where we remained for the night and had a dance on board which was kept up until 1 at which time I got to sleep. Ex 05 145

26th Sunday. Capt. Davis of the "J.D. Perry" which had brought us thus far, finding that the little freight and passengers he had for Omaha would not pay him for the trip, had rascality enough to refuse to go farther and announced this morning his determination to return. This was received with indignation by the passengers which probably relieved their minds; but produced no other appreciable benefit. Two gentlemen whose acquaintance I had made on the boat Messrs Whitcomb and Walker<sup>7</sup> were in haste to reach Omaha and invited me to join with them in hiring a team and proceeding forthwith. After some thought I agreed to go on condition that they provided me with a revolver and paid all extra expense, to this they assented and having after some flustration and delay obtained a double team we started soon after 10.

We went for sometime in a very erratic course, as there is no very direct road, through a fine rolling country. It is sparsely settled and many tenements are deserted for Pikes Peak.<sup>8</sup> At 2 we halted for an hour at a log cabin and took an excellent dinner. Came in sight of the Missouri at Plattsmouth and being unable to cross the Platte we crossed the Missouri into Iowa and followed up on that side. Night overtook us at St Marys and we put up at a dirty log-cabin Hotel.<sup>9</sup> Here we spent the night rather uncomfortably, Walker and myself sleeping together with pistols under our pillows. 40

27th Monday. Showers had fallen during the night and the ill-constructed cabin had admitted so much as to wet our luggage; but a little contrivance remedied most inconveniences of that sort. Took breakfast and started away early, across the plains. Took leave of our team at the

<sup>7</sup> The letter to the *Daily Courant* identifies these two as land speculators in a hurry to attend the first government land sales in Omaha, which took place on July 5.

<sup>8</sup> A number of Nebraskans had left for the recent gold rush in the Denver area.

<sup>9</sup> ". . . we stopped at a log-cabin hotel, which had it not been for an assurance to that effect nailed in the front, we should have mistaken for a piggery. Here by exercising all our little stock of faith as to the quality of the viands set before us, we finally appeased our hunger and retired to bed, with our baggage under the bed and ourselves upon it, each with a revolver under the pillow. We passed the night with one eye open getting what sleep we could with the other optic." (*Daily Courant*, July 11, 1859).

ferry and took passage on the omnibus for Omaha where we arrived soon.<sup>10</sup> Found my friends all well and glad to see me. Saw many indians in the town on my arrival. Spent most of the day in the house asleep but took a walk in the evening. Ex 2.00 20.

28th Tuesday. Wrote letters to "The Courant" H.H.S. & J.E.W.<sup>11</sup> which took a good share of my time. Walked out in the afternoon. Went to the Herndon House<sup>12</sup> to see Walker but did not find him. The town is built on an elevated plain some 20 feet above the river flats, which is crowned in the rear by the Capitoline Hill a fine elevation on which is a large building erected which may at some future time become the State House.<sup>13</sup> Pawnee Indians are numerous in the town and are to me an interesting subject for study.

Ex .16

29th Wednesday. Walked about the town. Saw many strange things. Met Walker in the streets and went with him to the Herndon. Walked up to the Capitol from which I had a fine view. Ex.76

July 2nd Saturday. The weather has been very hot this week so that I have not enjoyed it as much as I otherwise should have done. The indians we see here are very degraded; some of them are almost naked and most of the men wear nothing but a tattered blanket and a breech-clout. The women wear short petticoats and leggings; they are very accomodating and smile when they meet you and pat you on the back. Went bathing in the evening in a small creek to the north of the town.

3rd Sunday. Went to church all day. It was communion sabbath and I presumed to partake, Heavenly Father keep me from presumptuous sins. In the absence of Mr. Gay-

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<sup>10</sup> "On arriving at the landing we were met by a friendly deputation of the principal citizens, in the shape of 14 Pawnee Indians, ranged on the bank, . . ." (*Daily Courant*, July 11, 1859).

<sup>11</sup> Hudson Stoddard and J. E. Whittlesey.

<sup>12</sup> This hotel stood on the northeast corner of Farnam and Ninth Streets, "a hotel that would have been a credit to any metropolitan city in the United States in those days." (Alfred Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha*, 1923, p. 224, hereafter referred to as Sorenson.)

<sup>13</sup> Constructed in 1857 and 1858. (See illustration in James Olson, *History of Nebraska*, Lincoln, 1955, pp. 36-37.)

lord a Baptist minister preaches in the forenoon,<sup>14</sup> and Mr Haskell<sup>15</sup> of Council Bluffs preaches in the afternoon.

4th Monday. Independence. The Sabbath Schools of Omaha and Council Bluffs joined in a picnic at the Bluffs today. Went with Ralph to catch the horse in the morning which was accomplished after a chase of an hour and a half. Went to the church at 8 where we mustered and left in a body with a banner in our van. Crossed the ferry and arrived at Council Bluffs just as the procession was to start fell into ranks hastily and marched to the grove headed by the Council Bluffs Guards who were to have been joined by the Omaha Artillery; but they were unfortunately ordered out the night previously to help keep the Indians in some decent order<sup>16</sup> so that we were forced to get over their absence the best way we could. Seats were prepared at the grove a platform erected and a stand for the music though the first mentioned came down soon after they were occupied. Prayer was offered, the "Declaration of Independence" read, and speeches delivered by one or two gentlemen interspersed with music from the band: after which justice was done to an ample collation soon after which the assembly dispersed. Those who chose gathered at the church soon after where they spent an hour in speechifying and afterwards returned home. When we arrived at Omaha we were all invited into a saloon and treated to ice cream after which the company broke up

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. Reuben Gaylord, the Congregational minister in Omaha from 1855-65. The Baptist may have been Rev. A. S. Barnes, who came to Omaha in 1859. (Sorenson, p. 203).

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Jonathan S. Haskell, a Methodist minister, was one of the most colorful churchmen on the frontier. He had come into the ministry from a circus career to which he later returned. He was described by a contemporary "He is very theatrical, striking, antic, diverting and often irreverent in his manner. He didn't pray much with us. He has been a theatrical performer for 24 years. A good clean fellow." R. E. Dale "Otoe County Pioneers" unpublished Ms., Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> "The other most exciting topic now is the Pawnee war. The Indians, 3,500 in number, (according to most reliable accounts) previously to departing for their annual buffalo hunt, began plundering the settlers on the Elkhorn, stealing horses, killing and driving off stock, destroying crops, and burning houses. We have not yet heard of any settlers killed; though they have been fired on and wounded.—Several Indians have been killed and the main body is now retreating. Some 250 men are now in pursuit, of whom about 100 are from Omaha. The losses at last accounts amount to \$150,000 at least." (*Daily Courant*, July 25, 1859). The so-called Pawnee War ended without a fight. The Pawnee chiefs agreed to pay for any destruction of property and to surrender several young men guilty of looting.

well satisfied with the day. Was in the streets in the evening to see the fireworks which went off well in a small way. Ex 10 15

5th Tuesday.<sup>17</sup> Took a walk down to some Indian lodges near the ferry, and found that some vandals had burnt them and driven the occupants away. Some men arrived direct from Pikes Peak today with \$7,500 in gold.<sup>18</sup> They held forth in the evening to a loyal crowd and considerable excitement was manifested. An extra paper was published containing the latest news from that direction,<sup>19</sup> a copy of which I sent to "The Courant."

6th Wednesday. Took a solitary walk in the afternoon to the south hill, and in the evening ascended the Capitoline Hill with Sarah.

7th Thursday. Wrote a long letter to Peterson<sup>20</sup> in the morning. It was a terribly hot day.

8th Friday. Went in the afternoon on a berrying expedition. The party consisted of Mr Brown, Misses Margery & Emily Orchard, Two Misses Hoffman, Sarah two gentlemen and myself. We went in an open wagon about 3 miles

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<sup>17</sup> "The first public land sales in Nebraska commenced here on the 5th, continuing four days, during which there were sold 9,497 acres, for which there was received \$9,590. Much dissatisfaction was felt at the course of the Administration, in throwing the lands into the market at this time, when it is difficult for the settlers to pay, to avoid ejection and the loss of their improvements. Excitement was feared, and a public meeting was held in town to prevent trouble; but all passed off quietly, most of the sales being made to actual settlers; but a few speculators being on the ground." (*Daily Courant*, July 25, 1859).

<sup>18</sup> "The Hon. Mr. Byers, one of the editors of the Rocky Mountain News returned from the mines on the 5th inst., with \$7,500, some say \$10,000 in gold, which caused great excitement. He was honored with a public dinner at the 'Herndon' where he addressed an excited crowd, giving a highly favorable account. He returns soon with his family and a renewal of last Spring's stampede is looked for, which will increase the number of vacant houses in town, of which there are many now." (*Daily Courant*, July 25, 1859). William N. Byers was one of several Nebraskans who played a considerable part in the Colorado gold rush. Born in Ohio, he had lived in Iowa and settled in Omaha in 1854. He had served in Nebraska Territory as a member of the first legislature and as deputy surveyor. He went to Denver in 1859, where he established the *Rocky Mountain News*. Mollie, *The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sandford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories 1857-1866*. (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1959) p. 152n.

<sup>19</sup> *The Nebraskian*, after 1858 owned by Theodore Robertson. (Sorenson, p. 429).

<sup>20</sup> A Newington friend.

to the south and though we found few berries we had a pleasant time. 6

9th Saturday. Wrote and read all day. Took a walk in the evening, and went swimming in the Missouri. Ex .50  
10th Sunday. Just two months since leaving home, my time half gone at least, and I must occupy the remainder to the best advantage. Went to church all day.

11th Monday. Started early in the morning to go to Elkhorn City horseback. Went through Saratoga, Florence,<sup>21</sup> and some 6 miles beyond when I discovered that I had lost my way. After following crooked roads for a long time till I was out of patience I took a bee line for the south by the compass, over a country consisting of rolling hills covered with short grass with now and then a deep hollow with grass as high as a horse's back very hard to get through. Came to a house at last and from information there received I concluded to return to Florence where I arrived about sundown and put up at the "Willitt House."<sup>22</sup> Saw 22 indians in the course of the day. 21

12th Tuesday. Started immediately after breakfast for Omaha where I arrived soon after. I spent the day in

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<sup>21</sup> Elkhorn City was a village at the Elkhorn River crossing some twenty-five miles northwest of Omaha on the Military Road. It was chartered in 1856. Saratoga was located between Omaha and Florence, and although never chartered, its backers entertained high but misplaced hopes for its future.

Florence, chartered in 1855 at the site of the Mormon Winter Quarters, was a contender for the site of the territorial capital and the Pacific railroad crossing. When both prizes went to Omaha, Florence settled into a quiet existence, overshadowed by her more vigorous neighbor.

<sup>22</sup> Willet House, owned by the Florence Land Company, was located at the corner of Main and State Streets. It informed the public that "travelers and others will be accommodated with all the convenience and attention that can be procured in newly settled countries." *Florence Courier*, February 5, 1857 p. 2.

writing letters to the Courant<sup>23</sup> & J.E.W. and in preparation for starting for Iowa tomorrow morning. Ex 1.80 7

13th Wednesday. Rose before 5 and made hasty preparations for my departure. The carriage was at the door at 6 and taking leave of Cousin Mary and Sarah I embarked with a somewhat heavy heart. Took passage on the Steamer St. Mary which left at 7 in the midst of a furious rain storm which almost hid the city from sight and in the course of an hour the pleasant city of Omaha where I have passed so pleasant a time was entirely hidden from sight. At St Mary's in Iowa where we stopped to take on passengers the bank being high gave the plank a great inclination and being slippery with the rain was the occasion of several ludicrous incidents. About 1 mile below Plattsmouth on the Iowa side where we lay to take corn an incident occurred which came near being a tragedy. A man had a large quantity of corn in the storehouse which the keeper refused to open in consequence of some misunderstanding. The owner of the corn determined to get it at all hazards took a stick of wood and beat in the door and when the keeper interfered he cocked a revolver and kept him at bay while he finished his work. Arrived at Nebraska City at 9 o'clock P.M. where we received an accession of some 45 passengers which made the boat quite crowded. As there was a full moon we ran slowly all night.

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<sup>23</sup> It was in this letter that he described the city, the Pawnee War, the first land sale, and made this general observation concerning the new Western cities: "It sounds somewhat ludicrously to a Yankee to hear a place called a city, which in Connecticut would scarcely rise above the dignity of a hamlet. Three log cabins are said to be necessary for a city in Kansas, though here the standard may be slightly higher. The nucleus consists of two dram-shops, a billiard saloon, or land or law office, and a hotel, which surrounded by a few accessories and tenanted by a population sufficient to fill all the offices and allow for a healthy rotation, is organized into a full-fledged city whose momentous concerns are duly attended to by Mayor and Aldermen, the latter of course of sufficient mental and *physical* capacity. No sooner is the city organized than a college must be started, and a long list of professors, who administer instruction to about half a student each. . .

There appears to me to be in all western towns, a large number of young men whose principal occupation is hanging around saloons, and whose most active exercise is a game of billiards. Though I know that there is a host of active, busy, useful men at the West, and though I know that a hasty traveler sees that side of things sooner than the other; still it appears to me that the proportion of the idle dissipated young men is far greater than at the East. . . . These remarks must not be applied to Omaha particularly, which is fully up to the average of towns in its circumstances, but are of general application."

Four of us slept in a room 7 ft square but with both doors open and a good breeze blowing through we passed the night very comfortably. Ex \$11.00

14th Thursday Got up at 6 found the deck crowded with armed men 35 of whom came on at Nebraska City armed to the teeth with revolvers and bowie knives besides which most of them had guns or rifles. They were rather lawless and gave the captain some trouble. I asked one gigantic fellow what he did with such a knife, "I'll show you" says he, and pushing my head to one side with his left hand he made a savage blow with the knife at my bare neck. They left the boat in the forenoon about 50 miles from where they came on, and as I judged by appearances much to the relief of the captain. The day was hot and we arrived after a tedious voyage at St Josephs at 9 P.M. I proceeded at once to Allens Hotel and went to bed. Ex 25 cts 211

After a second visit of several weeks with friends and relatives in Iowa, he made the return trip home by way of Chicago and New York, with one more noteworthy incident. On the morning after leaving Chicago, while the train was rattling through Ohio,

Right opposite to me sat Stephen Arnold Douglass, the notorious Illinois demagogue who was on his travels under the care of Senator Pugh of Ohio.<sup>24</sup> They rec'd a noisy greeting as we passed the various towns in many of which they held forth to the multitude.

When he finally reached his Newington home on September 23, he concluded his account:

I have been farther west than most chance travelers have been at least to the distance of 350 miles beyond the Mississippi. . . . I have seen the savages of the desert in all their native wildness, have passed through some rough scenes and many dangers unharmed, and by the protecting care of Divine Providence have again arrived at home in safety.

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<sup>24</sup> Sen. Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois was the introducer of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and candidate for presidency as a regular Democrat in 1860.

George Ellis Pugh, a Democrat, served as Senator from Ohio from 1854-1860.