

## The Letters of Peter Bryant, Jackson County Pioneer

Edited by DONALD M. MURRAY and ROBERT M. RODNEY

### I. INTRODUCTION

PETER BRYANT, an original settler of Kansas territory and a citizen of Kansas during its first half century of statehood, lived from 1837 to 1912. The son of Cyrus and Julia Everett Bryant, who had left Cummingtown, Mass., in the early 1830's to pioneer in northern Illinois, Peter himself caught the "westering" fever in 1859. After a brief army career during the Civil War, he returned to his land claim near Holton, where he became a struggling pioneer and then, finally, a prosperous farmer and civic leader in northeastern Kansas.

Through his entire life Peter Bryant took a keen interest in the economic and political problems of his times, both local and national. In many ways an average man, he was gifted with a great curiosity about the new land and its people, the tenacity to endure the adversities of its pioneer stage, and a strong, healthy enthusiasm for life itself. Happily for us, he also had a flair for interesting and informative letter writing, and in consequence his vigorous letters and several occasional poems make a very readable contribution to the history of the Civil War and the settlement of the Trans-Mississippi West. Here we may read about "sod-busting," and "jayhawking," about crops and battles and elections, as well as domestic problems. Throughout this personal record, we are made aware of the Bryant family<sup>1</sup> as a whole: its roots in Massachusetts as deep as the founding of the nation; its firm transplantation to Illinois; and its sturdy offshoot in Kansas. Peter Bryant's life is a part of the Bryant family chronicle, and that chronicle is part of the westward movement.

The correspondence here brought together<sup>2</sup> consists of 54 letters,

DONALD M. MURRAY and ROBERT M. RODNEY are professors of English at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Ill.

1. Peter's paternal grandfather, after whom he was named, was Dr. Peter Bryant (1767-1820) of Cummingtown, Mass., who in 1792 married Sarah Snell (1768-1847) of Cummingtown. Their children were Austin (1793-1866); William Cullen, the famous poet (1794-1879); Cyrus, Peter's father (1799-1865); Sarah Snell (1803-?); Peter Bush, later called Arthur (1803-1885); Louisa Charity (1807-1868); and John Howard (1807-1902). Austin, Cyrus, Arthur, Louisa, John Howard, and Sarah Snell, the matriarch of the family, emigrated to Illinois in the early 1830's with the Hampshire colony from Cummingtown. See Frank J. Heisl, "The Bryants at Jacksonville," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Springfield, v. 19 (1925), pp. 218-227, and George V. Bohman, "A Poet's Mother: Sarah Snell Bryant in Illinois," in *ibid.*, v. 31 (1933), pp. 166-189.

2. The present editors are indebted to Mrs. Frank L. Davis of Holton, the granddaughter of Peter Bryant, for permission to publish this correspondence, and to Mrs. Christian G. Heck, chairman, and Mrs. F. R. Bryant of the Bureau County (Illinois) Historical Society Museum committee for their indispensable aid in reproducing the correspondence. The letters used are preserved in the Bureau County (Illinois) Historical Society Museum at Princeton, Ill., and in the New York Public Library, both of which institutions have given valuable assistance as well as permission to publish.

written between the years 1854, when Peter completed his formal schooling in Princeton, Ill., and 1906, a few years before his death in Holton. The present editors have divided the letters into groups representing three distinct periods of his life:

1854-1861: Illinois boyhood, migration west, pioneering in northeastern Kansas, jayhawking in Missouri.

1862-1864: Return to Illinois, service in the Vicksburg campaign, convalescence.

1865-1906: Farming and civic leadership in Jackson county, Kansas.

Born on June 2, 1837, Peter Bryant grew up on his father's farm in Princeton, Bureau county, Ill. The few early letters and school compositions that have been preserved from this period show that he enjoyed an active, outdoor boyhood. "I like to hunt first rate," he wrote at the age of 14. "Sometimes I have seen wild turkeys [*sic*]<sup>3</sup> and deer while hunting cattle, and very often when I chased them they would lead me to the cattle, and if I had a gun with me, I would have shot at them."<sup>4</sup>

He attended a private school in Princeton, the "Smith Institute," from which he graduated in the spring of 1854 at the age of 16. It was perhaps from his teacher here, as well as from his very literate father and uncles,<sup>5</sup> that he first acquired a taste for writing. Naturally enough, boys who were in school during the years just following the Compromise of 1850 wrote essays on the slavery issue. Peter wrote at least two conservative pieces on the effects of emancipation in the British West Indies<sup>6</sup> and participated in a lively discussion of slavery with his abolitionist Aunt Melissa of Massachusetts.

3. As an adult, Peter wrote with very creditable accuracy in spelling and grammar, generally speaking. In all the subsequent letters, however, the present editors have found it advisable to regularize his spelling (except in proper names), to provide minimum and modern punctuation whenever necessary, and to make certain paragraph divisions for the sake of clarity.

4. "The Pleasure of Hunting," a school composition dated Princeton, Ill., January 2, 1851, in the Manuscript room of the New York Public Library, hereafter referred to as N. Y. P. L.

5. Peter's father Cyrus (1799-1865) was educated at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Rensselaer Academy) at Troy, N. Y., and lectured for a time at Round Hill school at Northampton, Mass. According to a Bureau county historian, he was well versed in the sciences and "natural philosophy": "Probably no one in Illinois at the time of his arrival here had as broad a knowledge of those subjects as Cyrus Bryant." He was also something of a musician and a writer of verse.—George B. Harrington, *Past and Present of Bureau County, Illinois* (Chicago, 1908). His 700-volume library at Princeton, Ill., which was inspected by the present editors, was remarkably extensive, in both science and belles-lettres.

The literary work of William Cullen Bryant needs no explanation, but it should be mentioned that other members of the family did some writing. John Howard Bryant was the author of three books of verse. Arthur Bryant wrote an authoritative book on free culture and a long poem entitled "Emigration." Other Bryants wrote various pieces of occasional verse and prose which may be seen in *The Bryant Record* (Princeton, Ill., 1898). Peter's own literary efforts consist of the letters here published, certain pieces in *The Bryant Record*, and a long poem entitled *The Old Oak's Story* (Holton, 1897), which is mentioned in connection with his letter of September 13, 1906.

6. "The Effects of the Emancipation of Slavery in the British West Indies," undated; and another untitled, undated essay on the same subject, both in N. Y. P. L. Peter apparently depended on Henry Nelson Colledge's *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825* (London, 1826) for information and opinion.

Naturally enough, too, he dreamed of adventure on the frontier. A composition written in 1850 mentioned the wildcat killer, Davy Crockett, and the charms of Oregon and the Indian territory. "It is very mountains [sic] and abounds in horse thieves and catfish." The composition began with these verses, entitled "The Far Off West":

Away, Away to the far off West  
To the land of the prairie all so blest,  
There lives the wolf and the grizzly bear  
That will a man in pieces tear.  
Of white men only a few,  
Only the brave and the true  
Have ventured to the far off West,  
To the land of the prairie all so blest. [N. Y. P. L.]

Although these lines did not presage a poetic career like that of Peter's famous uncle, William Cullen Bryant, they are evidence of literary stirrings within the boy and a certain indication of his romantic interest in the West.

From the Smith school, Peter went to Knox College, in Galesburg, Ill. There are only two letters, both of 1854, written from the college, and how long he was a student there is not certain. There is no doubt, however, that the far-off West continued to lure him.

On April 6 or 7, 1859, Peter Bryant set off for Pike's Peak, probably accompanied by his Princeton friends Frank Pomeroy and Henry and Frank Dee.<sup>7</sup> He at first intended to become a miner in the gold "diggings," located in what was then western Kansas territory, but shortly after the end of May he and Frank found themselves no further on their journey than eastern Kansas territory, where the two young Illinoisans decided to file claims in Jackson county. For many months Peter labored on the land with his friend Frank, meanwhile feeling keenly the excitement of the times and sharing his Kansas friends' animosity toward the Missourians. Then, in May, 1861, just over two years after he had said goodbye to his brother Cullen in Bulbona Grove west of Princeton, Peter joined a volunteer rifle company in Holton, and was off "jayhawking."

The first letter of this period of Peter's life (1854-1861) is addressed to a cousin, presumably Emily Maria Everett, who was two

7. J. Frank Pomeroy's son is living in Holton at the present time (1958). Frank and Henry Dee (see letters of May 23, 1859, and April 13, 1862) may be among the seven sons of Elijah Dee, a prominent Princeton, Ill., citizen mentioned in H. C. Bradshy, *History of Bureau County, Illinois* (Chicago, 1885), p. 706, and in Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

years Peter's junior and the daughter of Dr. Oliver and Emily Everett, of Dixon, Ill. "Em" was to write to Peter frequently, in later years, until her death, of consumption, in 1863. The two other cousins mentioned are Elijah (1836-1892), son of John Howard and Harriet Wiswall Bryant, and Julian, son of Austin and Adeline Plummer Bryant. Born November 9, 1836, less than a year before Peter, Julian was to have a brilliant career as an officer in the 33d regiment, Illinois volunteers, and afterward as a colonel of a colored regiment. He was drowned in the Brazos river, Texas, May 14, 1865.

## II. THE LETTERS, 1854-1861

PRINCETON, March 20th, 1854

DEAR COUSIN [EMILY]

I received your letter in due time and was well pleased with it. There is but little news here. Our school was out last week on Friday afternoon. We had the "grand finale." We had two papers or written pamphlets containing the compositions of the scholars, one edited by the ladies called the "Guiding Star," and the other by the gentlemen named "Echo from Luckesdom." I thought they were pretty good. We also had several declamations all of which were very well spoken. For my part, I spoke "Mazzini's" proclamation to the Italian people.<sup>8</sup>

I believe the examination proved satisfactory both to teacher, scholars, and parents; at any rate, all seemed well pleased. We gave one teacher a present of Shakespeare's works & Byron's Poems with two or three other large books all of which cost about ten dollars. Julian Bryant<sup>9</sup> made a farewell speech; a large part of the school was affected to tears. The school had on badges; the girls wore a boro knot on the side of their heads, and the boys a triangle on the left breast. You say in your letter that you take Harper's Magazine; Cullen and I also take it; I think the best story is about the fellow setting down in the paint: the "Sword of Mauley"<sup>10</sup> in the January number. Father takes Putnam's Monthly, but I think I had rather have Harper's.

As for shooting, there is not much game around now but geese and ducks, and we have to go five or six miles out on the prairie; then they are sometimes very shy, and we can't tell when we are going to get any. It is pretty near time for pigeons if they come around this spring. I saw a deer yesterday, and Cousin Elijah shot at one the other day. The blackbirds have just begun to come around. We will have glorious fun popping them over.

The weather is and has been very fine for the past two weeks. The man that we have on the farm is one of the laziest fellows that ever was. He has run in

8. The Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1873). Peter probably used the popular treatise entitled "An Essay on the Duties of Man, Addressed to Workmen," of which parts 1-4 were available in translation by 1854. William Cullen Bryant's last public address, delivered just before his death in 1878, was a tribute to Mazzini, at the unveiling of the Italian's statue in Central Park, New York City.

9. Julian, Peter's classmate, later reveals his eloquence in several forthright and moving letters to the boys' uncle William Cullen Bryant, editor of the *New York Evening Post*. In a denunciation of the debasement of Colored troops by Northern officers during the Civil War.

10. "The Sword of Mauley," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, New York, v. 8 (January, 1854), pp. 239-248. It is a rather gothic tale, reminiscent of Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*. The incident that caught Peter's fancy is a minor one: a young man inadvertently sits down on a painter's palette and gets paint all over his "pantalcons."



debt to a merchant in town and has got mad at him and will not pay him. He has taken advantage of the law, which allows him \$60, and has nothing that the merchant can get hold of. Father has turned him off and got another man by the name of Davis. I guess he is rather smarter than the other one, for he has got his wheat in, and Hinres did not get his oats in until the 12th of April, and he had no wheat. I had quite a tumble yesterday. I went to take a colt over to a Mr. Clapps,<sup>11</sup> who lives about 3 miles. I rode the colt and led another horse which I was going to ride home. When I had got about a mile, the horse which I led broke the halter and got away. I could not catch her, so I thought I would take the colt along down there, but it would not go & I had no switch and could do nothing but *cluck*. Finally he reared up and fell over backwards on to me, which stunned me, and the first thing I knew there I was flying along rail road speed, heels upwards. One of my feet had stuck in the stirrup, and the colt dragged me about 10 rods when the girth band broke and I felt him kick me twice. I tried to get up and saw the colt about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile off "homeward bound" going at "pretty big licks." I picked up the saddle and started off towards home. Pretty soon a boy who had seen my performance came up with a buggy and took me home. I am not very badly hurt and intend to go to work again tomorrow if it don't rain, though there are pretty strong signs of it now.

[Letter unsigned, remainder presumably lost.]

The letter by Peter which follows is to his aunt, Melissa Everett Dawes, sister of Peter's mother, Julia Everett, and wife of Francis H. Dawes, of Cummington, Mass. Aunt Melissa took a great deal of interest in Peter and his younger brother Marcus, and made at least one visit to Princeton, Ill. In a letter of April 28, 1854, she had provided Peter with an extensive and ardent lecture on abolition. "You probably know, Peter, that I have from my childhood been an *out* and *out* Abolitionist, and I glory in the name, for I *know* it is the cause of Christ. It is a cause allied hard on to the bleeding Calvary. Every bone and sinew of my body is anti-slavery, and I wax stronger and stronger in the cause every hour I live." Judging from Peter's school compositions on emancipation and from this letter by Melissa, the boy was at this time no radical. Melissa's letter had continued: "You said some things in your letter which you probably did not mean. Now I would not allow myself ever to speak a word favoring that corrupt system, be it said ever so thoughtlessly."

In his answering letter, given below, Peter stated his position on slavery—as of the year 1854—and then gave the news on Princeton's latest participation in the great debate of the time. The Joshua R. Giddings whom he referred to was the prominent antislavery leader from Ohio. A biographer of Greeley, speaking of the year 1860, calls Giddings "the messiah of the abolitionists . . . ven-

11. H. C. Bradaby, op. cit., pp. 482, 483, mentions a Seth C. Clapp (1812-1871) and a John Clapp (1814-1850), both of whom were farmers in Bureau county.

erable with age." "Little Dug" was, of course, Stephen A. Douglas. Owen Lovejoy (1811-1864) was the brother of Elijah P. Lovejoy, the abolitionist martyr of Alton, Ill. Owen, who shared his brother's principles, was a free-soil statesman, Congregational minister, and "underground railroad" operator in Princeton. He was much admired by the Bryants.

PRINCETON [ILL.], Nov. 10th, '54

[Presumably to AUNT MELISSA DAWES]

It has been some time since I wrote to you, and I sometimes think you have got angry "because forsooth I tossed not on high my ready cap" upon hearing your glorious sentiments on the subject of slavery, but I believe you promised to not get angry if I would not. I don't think I am much more cross-grained than usual about it. As I wrote in my last that I was not in favor of slavery, I suppose you thought that I was well enough off, that there was no need of writing to me any more. If that is the case, I think I shall have to turn pro-slavery again. There are some good things in the Whig party and some in the Democratic, but if the fugitive slave bill is a test of the Whig party and the Nebraska Bill a test of the Democratic party, I belong to neither. They call all that are not Democrats, abolitionists, out here, but I am not an abolitionist not because I don't like the name, but because I am not in favor of the abolition of slavery, neither am I in favor of the extension. If the masters can be paid for their slaves, then let them go; if not, work God's own good time to overthrow it.

Our town has got to be "considerable pumpkins." It has got a rail road and has lately been honored with the visits of two great and mighty men; namely, Old Josh Giddings and Little Dug. Mr. Giddings made a very able speech, denouncing, of course, the Nebraska Bill, Giant, and all of his followers. Little Dug came here escorted by his half dozen worshipers (all there is in Princeton). They had arranged seats in front of the court house, where Giddings spoke (probably to deceive the people) as if they were going to have great times. As soon as the little fellow got here from the cars, he went into an office and held a short consultation while one or two of his party went and drummed up all the rowdies they could find. They then rushed up into the court room and filled up as much space as they could. Then Col. Thompson,<sup>12</sup> the main prop, stuck his head out of the window and gave notice that *the Giant was too unwell to speak out of doors*. Before beginning his speech, he offered to let the "black Republicans" send out their David to battle with him.

First he would speak  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour, then our man (Lovejoy) might speak  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour. After that he would answer him. The first speech he talked pretty decent with as good argument as might be expected. L[ovejoy] then commenced and knocked over all opposition and was going on at a great rate when tap, tap, went the chairman's hammer and he must stop. Then up jumped our little man, and such a volume of billingsgate as issued from his mouth for two hours and a half I never heard before. When he had got

12. J. V. Thompson, a Bureau county farmer who was at one time sheriff and who was quite prominent in civic affairs. Douglas was his political idol.—Bradley, op. cit., pp. 297, 345.

through, his friends set up a demoniacal howl of triumph which I never wish to hear again. I think the Anti-Nebraska army is stronger than before. They will certainly elect all the officers on that side. But I must stop writing politics, or like you I won't get in any news.

Uncle Arthur's house was burnt down lately. They are fitting it up again. They stay at Uncle Austin's now. They saved most of their furniture. There is considerable sickness about here now.

Our folks are all well.

[Unsigned]

This particular correspondence between Peter and Aunt Melissa ended inconclusively with a letter from Melissa dated November 24, 1854. She was still attempting to convert her young nephew to the righteous cause:

You say you think you will have to turn pro-slavery *again* in order to get a letter from me. What does that mean? That you have once been pro-slavery? From present appearances I should judge that you were not very thoroughly converted from it yet. Rather a curious jumble one is in, to be denouncing the old parties that are all festered and rotten in the corruption of slavery. You denounce these parties . . . and then you say you are not abolitionist.

Peter's conversion to the abolitionist cause was to await his arrival in "bleeding Kansas" five years later.

In the meantime Peter was corresponding with various school friends in a lighter vein and on subjects of more immediate—and probably of more emotional—interest than slavery. One of these letters was to his "Smithsonian" classmate, Z. S. Hills, who later became a teacher, then a school principal, and finally a lawyer. At the time, Hills was probably working as a store clerk in Lamoille, Bureau county, Ill.

PRINCETON [ILL.] Aug. 6th '54

FRIEND HILLS,

I wrote to you about four or five weeks ago and have received no answer, so I concluded that my letter must have been miscarried. I have not got any news to tell you as there is no school, so I certainly can't tell you about *the girls*. There is no blackberries down to the lake. If there was, I don't know but we might possibly drum up a load to go a blackberrying.

By the way, I am coming up there one of these days to see you and those pretty girls that you write of, probably this week or next. But I have some news yet. I understand that some of our Princeton girls are counterfeit. They paint themselves and daub on rouge. I hope there are not many such, for I know that you don't like to kiss cheeks that are more bitter than sweet, if they are redder, than I do.

This is a short letter, but my time is up and I must stop. Please write as soon as you secure this so as to let me know if you are alive and "stomping."

Your truly

PETER BRYANT

[On left-hand margin, in Peter's hand: "Not Sent."]

Although existing college records do not list his name, the following two letters indicate that Peter Bryant was enrolled at Knox College, in Galesburg, Ill., for at least a part of the academic year 1854-1855. Founded a year after Peter's birth, the college was located about 70 miles southwest of his Princeton home. Inasmuch as this distance would entail a two- to three-day journey by horseback in those days, Peter was effectively isolated from home and friends from the beginning to the end of a school term, even at Christmas. As noted in his first letter, the westward extension of the railroad from Chicago had just reached Galesburg during his fall term via the Central Military Tract railroad, which extended from Galesburg to Mendota, Ill., where it connected with the Aurora extension of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy.

The Charles Bryant mentioned in the first letter was Peter's first cousin, the son of Peter's Uncle Austin and Aunt Adeline Plummer Bryant, of Princeton. The college records show that Charles graduated from Knox, with a degree of bachelor of arts, in 1858. The cosigner of the two letters, who appears to have been Peter's college roommate, probably was Calvin E. Winship of Princeton, who later served in the 33d regiment of Illinois volunteers during the Civil War and died at Memphis in 1862.

KNOX COLLEGE [GALESBURG, ILL.] Dec. 8th 1854

DEAR FRIEND

I received your letter last evening. Was glad to hear from you. I have received two letters from Henry Martin since I have been here. They laid the C M T RR into town today. It was fun to see some of the people here who never saw a locomotive before scatter when the old gentleman whistled. The school is very full this winter, nearly three hundred in it. There are about twenty in my class, Charles Bryant among them. Ch wanted me to tell you to write to him and tell Cullen<sup>13</sup> to write, too. Tell him I want him to write to me, too. I like the company here very well. There is not so much rowdiness going on here as there is in Princeton. But I do not like the situation near so well. It is so far from the woods. I like to have a place near the woods where we can take a walk once in a while in the shade. Write soon and tell me how all the folks are getting along. For instance, Elijah<sup>14</sup> and Sylesta, Henry<sup>15</sup> and Pauline. When their weddings are coming off, for I want to

13. Peter's younger brother Cullen Bryant (1839-1909). Cullen entered West Point Military Academy in 1860, where he graduated in 1864. He served in the Ordnance department of the United States army during the last year of the Civil War and for some time thereafter, was promoted to major in 1891, retired in 1894, and died in Alameda, Calif.—*Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, v. 35 (1942), pp. 344, 346. Peter corresponded regularly with Cullen in later years.

14. Presumably Peter's cousin Elijah Bryant, son of John Howard and Harriet Wiswall Bryant.

15. The Henry Martin referred to in the letter of Christmas, 1854, below. Henry Martin and the girls here mentioned have so far proved unidentifiable. Henry apparently put off matrimony until 1862 (see letter of April 15, 1862, below), and Elijah married Laura Smith, not "Sylesta."

be [sic] to them. Tell Elijah I want him to write and tell me all about it. Give my love to all inquiring friends.

Yours truly

PETER BRYANT

C. E. WINSHIP

P. S. I will insert the following lines for Henry's benefit:

Lest Henry think he is supreme  
There is a stage line runs between  
And many a line may o'er it fly  
And turn his gladness into woe

KNOX COLLEGE [GALESBURG, ILL.] Christmas /54

DEAR FRIEND,

I wish you a *Merry Christmas*. I received your letter of the 15th inst. last Saturday eve. I am well and hope you are the same. I received a letter from Henry Martin the same day I received yours. He said he had a first-rate time on Thanksgiving day; spent the evening with *Dear Paulina*. I have just answered his letter. Gave him a lecture on using tobacco. Did not let him know that I had heard that he had commenced chewing tobacco. Told him that no lady would admire a tobacco chewer and smoker, and I knew Paulina did not. Told him I hoped he would prove worthy of her company.

I hope your Princeton Institute will prosper and become a great and flourishing institute and send out men to fill the seats of the legislature and Congress and also to fill the President's chair. Tell Lucien Smith that I am beginning to think he don't care anything about me. I wrote a letter to him when I first came down here, and he has not answered it yet, or if he has the letter did not come here. I am not going to write till he answers that, but think as much of him as ever. Tell H. Elliott<sup>16</sup> to write and all others of my old friends. Mr. Goodrich (that went to school there last winter) is down here, is going to commence with the Prep class next term.

Write soon

Yours with much respect

PETER BRYANT C. E. WINSHIP

For approximately three years following his Knox College experience, Peter remained in Princeton, Ill., working on his father's farm. Letters written to him by his cousin Emily Everett and various friends<sup>17</sup> indicate that he was enjoying an active social life, particularly in exchange visits with his Everett cousins of Dixon, Ill. These letters, moreover, show that he had a continuing desire to go west.

16. Presumably Isaac H. Elliott, one of Peter's more illustrious friends. Elliott was born in 1837, graduated from the University of Michigan in 1861, was made captain of Princeton's E Company of the 33d Illinois volunteers (in which Julian Bryant enlisted), and was promoted Brevet Brigadier General in 1865. After the war Elliott was elected treasurer of Bureau county, ran for congress in 1872, was a Garfield elector in 1880, and was adjutant general of Illinois, 1881-1884. In 1884 he went into the cattle business in New Mexico. He married Elizabeth Denham, stepdaughter of Owen Lovejoy, referred to above.—See Isaac H. Elliott, *History of the Thirty-Third Regiment Illinois Veteran Volunteer Infantry* (Gibson City, Ill., 1902), pp. 11, 12, and Bradsher, op. cit., p. 513. Peter kept in close touch with Elliott's war career. See his letters of January 3, and March 2, 1862, below.

17. N. Y. P. L. has letters covering the period January 1, 1853, to July 25, 1858, addressed to Peter by the following persons: Melissa E. Davies, Z. S. Hills, Emily Everett, E. T. Carpenter, Elijah Bryant, Robert H. Davis, and Bentley Gill.

As early as the fall of 1856, Peter apparently planned to seek his future in the Western territories, with an inclination particularly toward the strife-torn but promising region west of Missouri. On October 23, 1856, his cousin Emily wrote: "Do you expect to go to Kansas soon? You seem to be so anxious to go." The reasons for his delay can only be supposition, but the fact that he was only 19 and still a minor might have prevented him from taking such a bold step at that time. A romantic reader might detect a wistful note in Emily's letter, and even unsentimental readers must allow for the strong emotional ties of home, family, and the many Princeton friends.

Whatever his reasons, Peter waited three more years, corresponding meanwhile with friends like Robert H. Davis, who wrote to Peter on April 20, 1857, about plowing and hunting on a Minnesota claim. Then, in the spring of 1859, Peter's plans finally took shape. On April 6, just two months before his 22d birthday, he started out with three friends for Pike's Peak in western Kansas territory. The many letters that he wrote home, especially those to his two brothers, provide his own first-hand narrative of experiences that were crucial not only in his own life but in the development of the Trans-Mississippi region and in the national history.

The following group of 22 letters, written between May 26, 1859, and October 13, 1861, forms a fairly coherent and self-explanatory account. In these letters, Peter describes vividly the hazards and frustrations of homesteading on the Middle Border, and the economic and political conditions under which he strove. Of particular interest to the student of national and regional history are his exuberant outburst on the election of Lincoln in his letter of November 11, 1860; his ironic account of the political machinations of James H. Lane and Samuel C. Pomeroy in the letters of March 10, 1861, *ff.*; his observations on the gathering of volunteer troops in Kansas, in his letters of April 21, 1861, *ff.*; and the fast-paced little narrative of his "jayhawking" experiences in his letters of September 1, 1861, *ff.*

This first phase of Peter's new life in the West ends with his realization that border-state guerrilla excursions were not going to decide the national issue, and his resolution to return to Illinois and join the volunteer forces being recruited from his old home county. By January 3, 1862, he was back in Princeton, preparing for the second phase of his life as a Northern soldier in Grant's Western campaign.

The first letter finds Peter Bryant in one of the new settlements beyond the Missouri:

TOPEKA, K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY] May 26 [1859]

DEAR FATHER

Our Pikes Peak operation has "gin out." We traveled about 80 miles west of St. Jo. During this travel we met about a thousand teams returning towards the diggings<sup>18</sup> with very unfavorable reports, so we concluded to go south and have got thus far. We are trying to get a job of breaking now. We can find a great plenty if we will take land or stock<sup>19</sup> for pay.

Cash money is very scarce here, and if we can find a job, we can get \$3.00 per acre for it or \$7.00 in trade.

There are some splendid prairie claims<sup>20</sup> to be had about here, but no timber. The best timber that I have seen is not half as good as that of Bureau Co. It sells from \$5.00 to \$20 per acre.

I want to take a claim but have not money enough to pay for it. I have \$36 in cash and my cattle and provisions and want to make all I can.

If you will buy me a land warrant for a quarter section, I will pay you up with ten per cent interest as soon as I can. Land is to be sold here on the 15th of August at auction, and they will not take warrants for pay, so if [I] get one I will have to preempt. They are worth \$165 here. I am going to look around a little as soon as we get the teams to work. I think I shall go to Emporia and see what the Judge<sup>21</sup> can tell me.

We are all well. Henry Dee talks of going home if we will buy him out, and I think we will. Greeley<sup>22</sup> spoke here last night. I did not hear him.

I am writing this in the Post Office and must stop for the mail is going out.

YOURS

PETER BRYANT

Direct to Topeka K T

TOPEKA [KANSAS TERRITORY] July 3rd 1859

DEAR BROTHER [presumably MARCUS]

I received your letter of June 12th some time ago and was so confounded glad to hear from home again. Yours and fathers were the first letters that I had after I came here, and it was so long that I didn't know but you had all forgotten me. I have been laying up for ten or twelve days with the typhus fever, but am about well now. We are having some pretty warm weather here nowadays. I believe this country is a little ahead of Ill. in that line. Corn about here looks pretty well. There is a field in sight of my window

18. Probably an error for "from the diggings," i.e., the mining camps along Cherry Creek, Colo., where gold had been discovered in 1858. See another reference by Peter to his original intention of going to Pike's Peak, in his first letter dated April 7, 1861.

19. In his *Information for Kansas Immigrants* (Boston, 1856), p. 8, Thomas H. Webb, of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, informed prospective settlers in 1856 that "the price of good working cattle, horses, cows, &c., is nearly the same in Kansas and its vicinity as in New England; perhaps rather cheaper. The price of cows has heretofore ranged from \$25 to \$35; oxen per yoke from \$50 to \$100; horses from \$75 to \$100 each; common sheep from \$1.50 to \$2.50 each."

20. Methods by which Kansas land could be acquired during this period included: public land sales, pre-emption under the act of 1841, the sale of Indian lands, and land warrants issued under military bounty acts.

21. The "Judge" is C. F. Eichaker (often translated to "Oakfield"), a German immigrant befriended and financially aided by Peter's father. Eichaker settled on the Neosho near Emporia, at the same time, approximately, that Peter settled in Jackson county. Six letters (1862-1864) by Eichaker are preserved in N. Y. P. L. and one in the museum of the Bureau County Historical Society, at Princeton, Ill.

22. In 1859 Horace Greeley took a long-contemplated trip to California, making political speeches as he went west. In Kansas he aired one of his favorite ideas—the abolition of a standing army.—Glyndon G. VanDeusen, *Horace Greeley: Nineteenth-Century Crusader* (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 230. Greeley is reported to have said, after his visit to Kansas, "The twin curses of Kansas, now that Border Ruffians have stopped ravaging her, are Land Speculators and One Horse Politicians."—Alice Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas* (New York, 1954), p. 258. For Peter's views on Greeley as a politician, see letter of August 28, 1872.

where it is as high as a man's shoulders just as it stands without stretching the leaves. Wheat is about all ripe, and some of the farmers have got done cutting. They have not got to raising such thundering fields yet as they do in the old country, but they generally have 15 or 20 acres. Farming is not carried on very largely yet, but I think it will be some time. At any rate, they have got a mighty soil to back them. All the objection I see is that there is not half timber enough, although what there is, is pretty well scattered and generally not of the best quality.

Game is very scarce right about here with the exception of rabbits, prairie chickens, and quails. They are plenty as any one could wish. There are some wolves, but we can hardly ever get a sight of them. The Pottawattamie Indian Reservation bounds the town on the north and west, and we see considerable of the Indians. They lounge around town a good deal, and most of them are willing to drink all the whiskey they can get. The Squaws are just as fierce as any of them for it. I met a drove of Squaws the other day. Three of them were girls and tolerable good looking, and they hailed me with "How." I said "how," then "Where goin'?" "Up creek." "Where from?" "Topeka. Any tobac'?" "No." "Any Whisk?" "No." "Ugh, ugh," and they went on.

I suppose if I had had the "whisk" I could have lit on their fections like a hot pancake, but as it was I was "no good," and they didn't care anything about me. —There is going to be a circus in town this week, and they say the whole tribe will turn out then. If they do, I will bet we will see some fun. Every Indian has his pony, and some of the old coves have thirty or forty. The Squaws ride straddle, but with short stirrups so as to bring their knees nearly up to their chins. The little Indians can shoot the bow and arrow pretty well. I have seen the whites split a stick and put in the edge of a five-cent piece and stick it up four or five rods off, and they would generally knock it out within five shots. The one that shot it had it.—

You ask if there are any strawberries here. Well, I only lit on two or three good patches, but the Squaws bring in lots of them. You can buy a six-quart pailful for 15 cents. I saw more mulberries when I went down on the Cottonwood than I ever saw in my life before, but they have all gone long ago. Blackberries are getting ripe now. Strawberries are about gone on the 1st of June. We are going buffalo hunting this fall. We would like to have some of you fellows along, for instance Lige and Kit and the rest of you—

Pete

Tell Lige to kick Helen's starn and bid her good bye [insertion at top of last page]

Give us all the news and girl affairs when you write. Your last was first-rate in that respect— Frank sends his respects and Chet<sup>23</sup> his. Tell Lige to write to Peter [insertion at top of first page]

HOLTON [KANSAS TERRITORY] Aug. 21st 1859

DEAR BROTHER [presumably MARCUS]

Your letter of July 24th has been on hand a good while, but I have only just got on hand to answer it. It is awful hot weather just now, and we work about as hard as we "darn please," but that takes all the time, so I can't get much to write.

23. "Chet," Chet's sister, and his girl are mentioned frequently in subsequent letters. See below, letters of February 12, 1860, and March 2, 1862. Possibly this is Chester Tracy, who was wounded in the battle of Yazoo Pass. See letter of April 19, 1863, and note.



We are cutting hay now-a-days. I tell you, when it comes to swinging an old grass-hook all day and then to rake it up with a hand rake, it is as old Mother Eaton said about the sage, "tryin' to one's soul," especially in this frying weather, and Lord knows my embryo farm can't begin to sport a mower yet. There have lots of other things got to come first. Yet, far away in the dim vista of the future methinks I see the scarcely visible outlines of a mower hard at work sawing down the prairie grass, and—and—and me a-driving—but hold on, who is that out there breaking his back over that crooked stick—ah, that is different, that is Pete today.

Now say that "you should think one claim would be rather small for two of us." It is, but I had rather have fifty acres and thirty of timber in one lot than a whole quarter of prairie without a stick within three or four miles of it. 80 acres will be as much as I want to farm at present, and when I want more there is lots of it close by. There is always somebody willing to sell.

Things must look pretty sleek about home, now that you have got a new fence, if you keep the weeds down, which of course you do. Mother will see to that.

About that school— Instead of getting Green meyered (?) myself, I have performed the operation on them.

I afterwards found out that it was a real Missouri border ruffian den, and they have fusses there every little while, so I told them I didn't want it.

Their wages at present are \$25 per month and board. I am going to try to get a school about here if I can. The one I spoke of is down by the river. I am well acquainted with the school commissioner for this county, and he will want my vote for circuit clerk, so I think there is a pretty good chance if I am in time, and I'll see to that.<sup>24</sup>

Buffaloes can be found 100 miles west of here on the Republican Fork. I was talking about it with an Indian the other day, and here is what he said—"Ugh, heap, heap Ingen kill heap one, two, tree, hunner—heap white man—no Pawnee." —That means that he saw lots, his party killed 300, he saw a great many white hunters, but no Pawnees. —It looks mighty "jibus" about our getting off this fall, there is so much work to do. Still, I am in hopes we may. —A hundred miles probably looks a good ways to you, but it is nothing after you get out here. You can see 25 of it at one stretch. When a man has got 30 or 40 miles to go, he makes nothing of trotting it out on shanks hosses. Still, I think it is considerable easier to ride.

I wish you would send me some receipts for making different kinds of sauce, or tell the girls to— We haven't had any in all summer, and to go all winter without is most too hard. We can get tomatoes and grapes and cucumbers and I don't know what all. We have the darndest kind of living here. Sometimes it is all pancakes, sometimes all something else. Once we lived for three weeks on nothing but mush and milk. We have tried most everything, codfish not excepted, and I can go it as well as anybody. I think it would do you good in the feed line to come out here. They have the nastiest women here that I ever saw, and I can beat half of them cooking. Not all the women are nasty, but a "heap."

PETE

<sup>24</sup>. Peter did eventually do some school teaching, for a time at least. See Frank Pomeroy's letter of February 11, 1861, and Peter's letter of March 10, 1861.

HOLTON K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY] Sept 25th /59

DEAR BROTHER [presumably MARCUS]

I received your letter of Sept. 11th. I was very glad to hear from home again. It seemed almost an age since I had a letter. I was thinking about going to meeting today, but as it was a wet, misty kind of a day and the preaching is a mile and a half off, I think I won't go. We don't have any regular preaching here, but once in a while a Methodist comes along, and now and then a "local" will get up and spout. It would be a good place for a smart young man to get a start. The preachers here are generally rather poor, dry concerns and, like Charles, would do well to "go and leave their bones" somewhere.

I am glad you have got the work so well along. It certainly is something strange to get done haying before the 1st of Sept. We have got about 16 tons cut, and I think we will cut a little more. We are engaged in building a log-cabin now, and it is awful on breeches. Frank has filed a prairie claim one mile west of us, and by paying half I can have the benefit of his preemption right, as he did of mine, and we have a year's time to pay it in, and I hope by that time to be able to pay up all I owe on this claim. I wish you would ask father if he wants my note for the amount of that land warrant, or does he think I am trustworthy without it. I should think it would be better to have it, so if I should happen to "go by Davy" he would be all right.

Our new claim has got a stone quarry on one corner, has plenty of stock water, and is on the whole a very good claim.

There are several claims taken in this neighborhood after the sales, though there was only one lost by an actual settler, and that was through carelessness.

We are having fine weather, no frost yet. We have had some little of the ague.<sup>25</sup> At one time all three of us were shaking. I suspect it would kind o' tickle you to see us shake some of these hot days, but come to the stern reality of the thing and it ain't quite so funny.

However, we took a dose of quinine each and got a bottle of Ayers Ague Cure<sup>26</sup> and have got bravely over it now, and you may bet we ain't sorry. Our "Sass"<sup>27</sup> operation I think are done for. We have nothing to keep it in, and we can't get jars this side of Leavenworth.

We live pretty high now. We have taters, beans, tomatoes, corn dodgers, and all the melons we want to roll in. We have got about 1½ bushels of shucked hazel nuts (the benefits of ague). And on our claim there are more than fifty bushels of black walnuts. Then besides we have got a lot of dried grapes and about a bushel of pickled cucumbers. I think we will manage to get through the winter. Frank and I have a fair prospect of boarding out. I think we will burn a lime kiln this fall. We can get plenty of rock, and if we can engage a hundred bushels beforehand, we will go at it. It is worth 25¢. Perhaps we can get some dimes in that way. We can get lots of work, but no money. They've all got something to trade. Our cattle are all "hog fat." They play now-a-days. Write soon.

P. BRYANT

25. The ague, which produced chills with "the shakers," burning fever, yellowing of the skin, and sometimes loss of hair, began in this region about August 1 and lasted until October. Newcomers feared it, with reason, and its terrors sometimes prevented immigrants from moving into new territories. A good account of how this malarial fever plague affected the Illinois immigrants appears in Earl Wiley Hayter, "Social and Economic Conditions in Illinois, 1800-1824" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of History, Northwestern University, 1934), pp. 200, 201.

26. A patent medicine manufactured by Dr. J. C. Ayer and Company, of Lowell, Mass.

27. Presumably a home-made preparation from *sassafras* bark.

HOLTON K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY] Feb 12th/60

DEAR BROTHER [MARCUS]

I received your letter of the 29th ult. I dated one the same day which I presume you must have got before this. I have been washing today. Perhaps you may think it is big business for Sunday, but we have had a little fall of snow, and it was thawing very fast today, so I had to pitch in and get some or else use hard water.

Frank is trying to have the ague again. He had quite a shake today. We are making rails in old Rays timber for half. Some of it is pretty tough. We have taken a job of making 700 for another man for town property in Holton. We get six lots for the job and have our choice of three. I think we will do some fencing this spring, though I can't tell whether we will stay here or not. We are going where we can make the most. Merchants in Leavenworth offer \$10 per cwt. for hauling goods to Pikes Peak. We think we could make \$300 at that. Then two of us could get a job of driving team for Uncle Sam to some of the forts on the frontier.

We have had the finest weather this winter that I ever saw, but very little snow and no rain since the first of Sept. and not much cold weather. Wolves are pretty thick, but so wild that we cannot get a shot at them.

Chet and I went out the other morning after it snowed and caught 7 rabbits in about an hour. Rackley<sup>28</sup> is boarding with us and has his law office in our cabin, so you may imagine justice is duly meted out. He is going to Holton tomorrow to pettifog a case before a justice of the peace.

He takes the Princeton Republican, so I did not get any news in the one Cullen sent me. We have a pretty good stock of papers now. We take the Leavenworth Times and N. Y. Tribune, and Rackley has the Topeka Record and Princeton paper, and we get along a good deal better than we did last summer without any.

There is any amount of land here that can be bought for the taxes, principally what is called Delaware Trust land, that is land that was sold in trust for the Delaware Indians in 1857, and it is mostly very fine land.

There is some talk of sectionizing the Pottawatomie Reserve and letting the Indians sell it themselves if they choose. If this is done, I think there can be farms bought very cheap, and they have some of the best land in the territory. In fact, all of the reserves made by the Indians throughout the territory are of the best land.

Chet's sister writes him of lots of chaps being spliced back there, amongst them being Jim Vanatta. There has been but one case of the kind about here since I have been here.

PETER BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],  
Feb'y 20th 1860

DEAR FATHER

I received your letter of Feb'y 9th, enclosing a ten dollar bill. I am always very thankful for such letters and would not object to their coming every day. I think the bill is current here, for almost everything that bears the form of money is; but not having had occasion to use it, I have not enquired. —In re-

28. David Rackley (1834-1863), son of F. D. and Dorothy Kenny Rackley, of Bureau county, Illinois.—Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 625. Rackley is frequently referred to in subsequent letters. He died of disease contracted during the Civil War. See Peter's letter of March 1, 1863.

gard to the farm trade, Frank offered to sell to me for the same that he paid, with 12 per cent [interest] added. We have looked over the books and find that each of us have paid on the claim, and for improvements, the sum of \$211.35; and 12 per cent on that for six months would be a trifle less than \$225. —It is true I would like the land very well, and it would make a very fine farm altogether, but I do not want you to run yourself short nor hire any money for me. I can do that out here by paying interest enough, but I am unwilling to run into debt without seeing some way to get out again; and if you let me have the money and I stay here on my place, as you and Mother seem to want I should, you will have to lay out of it for some time, three or four or perhaps five years; for I suppose you know by experience that in opening up a new farm, it is all outgo and no income.

In regard to your never calling on me for it, I do not want it on those terms, for if I cannot get along in the world now at my age [22], the sooner I am out of it the better. —There is still one payment of \$75.00 to make on the land, for which the man is bound by contract to take 25 acres of prairie-breaking. It is due by the first of August. —This I will have to pay myself in case I buy out Frank. It will be about two weeks' work with team. If you should conclude to send me money, I think I can make \$175.00 do. I can manage to pay the other fifty without much trouble by next fall, and perhaps have enough left to get me some hogs and a cow. —As to the transmission of the money of which you speak, I think the best way will be to send it to Leavenworth City by express. Dee had a land warrant sent in that way and got it without any trouble. Frank intends to improve the claim that he filed on after the sales. It is all prairie and a medium claim. If I should buy here, I will sell him my interest, in that our quarters would then lay in a body, and not one 80-a-mile from the other as now.

I will send you a rough map that I have drawn up, by which you can perhaps get some idea of how the land lays. —Since I got your letter, I have about given up the idea of going across the plains, though it does seem as though I had [not] seen half enough yet.

Frank and Dee have been having a little touch of the ague lately. My health is excellent, and by feeding on corn dodger beef and potatoes I have got quite fat and now only lack a few ounces of weighing 180 lbs.

We are having very fine weather now and have had all winter. There was a shower the other day and the first rain that has fallen for five months. I am glad to hear that Cullen is going to West Point, though it seems to me that it will be a pretty tight squeeze if he gets in. I received a "Republican" a day or two since. Young Rackley is boarding with us at \$2.00 per week. I don't know whether he will settle here or not.

PETER BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],  
March 4th 1860

DEAR BROTHER [MARCUS]

I have received your letter of Feb. 16th. I had gone to Atchison when it came and didn't get back till day before yesterday and don't suppose I can get anything there on time for your paper which comes off in four days, so I guess I had better drop it. But if you get into such a snap again, just let me know in time and I will try to do what I can for you, if unless like this

time I happen to be away from home. I went down to Atchison to help haul up a saw mill to Holton and made \$20 in five days, but have to take my pay in sawing when they get in operation. Lumber is very high here. Oak and walnut lumber sells for \$25 per thousand.

So you have got a lyceum going again, have you? What has become of the reading circle? —We have a mock legislature in our neighborhood, and Frank is speaker. We bring in bills and discuss them, and make laws with all the dignity imaginable.<sup>29</sup> I have been to meeting today, the third time since I have been here. The Methodists are going in largely just now. They have about as brilliant a preacher as the hard shell Baptist of the "Harp of A Thousand Strings" notoriety. He said that when his hearers shuffled off this Mortal Coil, he wanted them to die "Revered with glory," and again that his motto was that he had "always had a kind heart,"—and in a prayer he said, "Lord, thou knowest we are great sinners, the chief among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely." The Methodist are quite numerous in the territory, and they say that before three years they are going to rule Kansas.

I got a letter from Cullen yesterday. —I wrote to Sarah Olds<sup>30</sup> a while ago, but have got no answer yet. It is getting dark, and I must wind up. I am sorry that I didn't get your letter in time to write a piece for your paper.

PETER BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY]

May 1st 1860

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

Yours of April 6th came to hand today. It has been on the road a good while. I dated one the same day to Marcus and Father and have received an answer from Father. I expect to go down to Topeka in the course of a week or fortnight. We are breaking [ground] some about now, at present for December. We have bought a cow and paid for her in breaking. I traded for a pony yesterday. It will cost me about \$50 when I get it paid for. I pay \$15 down, \$5 when the chap gets back from off the plains where he is going this summer, and ten acres of breaking to be done by the middle of May 1861.

It is a pretty good price for a pony, but it is the best that I can do, and I had rather pay it for horse-flesh than for quinine or "Ayers," which I certainly would have to do if I "toted" around in the wet grass after the bulls every morning. It is very easy catching the ague here. If a fellow is a little unwell, it is mighty apt to turn into shakes. It is pretty easily cured now, but won't be after it gets to be hot weather. I have had one chill since last fall, and Frank and Chet have it every little while.

It is very dry here. We have had but one or two slight sprinkles this spring. Prairie breaks pretty hard, but we have got a thundering team, and the old sod has to roll, dry or not.

Rackley has left our shanty and is now stopping in Holton, waiting for a chance to go to Leavenworth. He was admitted to the bar last week. He is going to leave his books with us and see a little of Kansas.

The grass here is first rate, notwithstanding the dry weather. Cattle fat on it the quickest here of any place that I ever saw. Bully was sick this spring

29. This training in practical politics anticipates Peter's service, six years later, in the Kansas legislature of 1867. Information from Mrs. F. L. Davis of Holton.

30. Daughter of Justin Olds and Louisa Bryant Olds, the sister of Cyrus Bryant. Sarah lived 1859-1860.

and got quite poor, so that I began to think he would visit "San hedrin" and I would have to buy another ox, but he has got fat again and my fears have departed.

In regard to snakes, they don't bother anyone here but Chet. Jovel you ought to see him jump when a "garter" gets into the furrow. I think I have seen him leap 8 feet right straight up in the air at sight of one's tail. Rattle-snakes are about as thick here as in Illinois. I don't think we killed over twenty last summer.

John Ritchie,<sup>31</sup> one of the "Topeka Boys," has just killed a U. S. Marshal who was trying to arrest him on some of the old scores of '56, and Old Buck's men<sup>32</sup> were all around the territory trying to find him. He is probably stowed away somewhere near home. The Governor has offered \$300 reward for him, and the people of Shawnee County have held a meeting and resolved that Mr. Governor could not have him. He has got the "get up and git" to him a good deal like Lovejoy. By the way, Lovejoy has acquitted himself nobly. We could not have asked more of him. I hope he carries his "iron" so as to be ready if any of those Southern scamps jumps on him.<sup>33</sup>

PETER BRYANT

I have not received that money yet. I wrote to the Express agent and told him where I lived and to let me know when the package arrived. The river is very low. It takes a good while for boats to come from St. Louis. [Inserted at top of first page.]

TOPEKA, K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],

May 13th 1860

DEAR FATHER

I have received your note of April 13th and also a letter of April 17th informing me that you had forwarded the money. I have received it and just returned from Leavenworth. The agent did not like to let me have it on the strength of that duplicate, but when I showed your letter and an answer that he wrote to my inquiry, I got it without any further trouble. They are very particular who they let have packages. This man was civil, but the agent here last summer was far from it.

I enclose my note for the amount. It will probably be three or four years before I can pay it all up, but I will try and get it off my hands as soon as possible.

We came here yesterday and are going to work for the same man that we did last year. He told us a while ago that he wanted us to break 75 acres for him, but I do not know whether we will do it or not. There is no grass here for the cattle. Everything in that line is dried up. The grass at Holton is very good, and I was surprised at the difference that there is in thirty miles. It is very dry in Holton, so much so that the winter wheat will not amount to anything. Here it is not three inches high. Spring wheat will be in the same fix if it does not rain soon. There was wheat enough sown in the territory to

31. John Ritchie of Topeka who was mustered in July 16, 1861, as captain of Company A, Fifth regiment, Kansas cavalry; was promoted to lieutenant colonel September 10, 1861, in the same regiment; and was promoted to colonel, Second Indian home guards, March 28, 1862.

32. The federal officers of President Buchanan.

33. Both Peter and F. H. Dawes (the husband of Peter's aunt, Melissa) comment on Lovejoy's sturdy defense of abolitionist principles in congress. See Dawes' letter of May 18, 1862, in N. Y. P. L.

supply the home demand if it had come to anything. But very few have planted any corn here. They are mostly done at Holton.<sup>34</sup>

I do not know how long we will stay here. We bought a yoke of cattle, for which we break 23 acres. If we do any more, we get the money for it. We get \$3.00 per acre and board ourselves. That is as cheap as anyone can afford to do it and pay Kansas prices for provisions.

When I was down to the river, I went to the Land Office and found that Frank's claim had been entered by a speculator. He intends to contest it. Gen. Whitfield<sup>35</sup> says there is no doubt but what he can get it. It will make him some cost. There are one or two others about there in the same way. Henry Dee entered one that had been filed on but no improvements made. He need not be alarmed about it. He can hold it without any trouble.

If you come out here this summer, as Marcus told me you anticipated, I wish you would bring out my riding bridle and martingale. I can't get one here without paying two prices. I should be very glad to see you out here, and would take great pleasure in showing you the "elephant" and my place.

The Missouri River is very low. Steamboats do not run any higher up than Atchison, and they all wear "grasshoppers" to lift them off from the sand bars.<sup>36</sup> I waded the Kaw yesterday and drove across four yoke of cattle. Deepest spot 3½ feet.

Yours affectionately

PETER BRYANT

TOPEKA, K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],  
May 20th 1860

DEAR BROTHER [MARCUS]

I received your letter of several dates (the latest of which was May 10th) yesterday, and today I feel in about the same fix that you say that you did; i. e., darned lazy. I went to town today and got the papers and found that "Old Abe" was the nominee, and I was awfully tickled. I thought that Seward would be nominated. Didn't think that Abe had a ghost of a chance, but I am glad that he has got it. I believe that he will be President. At any rate, if we are admitted you may bet the last hat that you have got in the world that "Bleeding Kansas" will roll up 10,000 majority for him, and if you don't win every time, I will give you two for each one you lose.

I don't know as there is much home news here. We are tearing along as usual with our old breaking plow and five yoke of cattle. We make things come, but it is awful hard work. It is very dry. There comes a shower once in a while, but not enough to do any good. The old chaps around here shake their heads and say they are afraid that they are not going to make any crop, and I tell you it looks mighty billious and very much as though those that had been in the habit of living on hog and dodger would have to take the hog clear this time.

34. This was the year of a disastrous drought. Leverett Spring wrote: "For more than a year little or no rain fell, and crops failed everywhere. Probably fifteen or twenty thousand people were thrown upon public charity. Again Kansas put out signals of distress, to which the public made a quick and generous response."—*Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union* (Boston, 1899), p. 271. See Peter's further comments on the drought, in letters of May 20, July 22, November 11, and November 14, 1860; and March 10, 1861.

35. John W. Whitfield, delegate to congress from Kansas territory.

36. In *Roughing It* (New York, 1913), p. 17, Mark Twain described a difficult six-day trip by steamboat from St. Louis to St. Joe. There were sandbars "which we roosted on occasionally, and rested, and then got out our crutches and sparrd over."

Topeka goes on with her improvements as fast or faster than ever, and how they do it I don't see, for there is very little money afloat. I suppose they trade around and everybody makes something. There is hardly a man here but is ready to trade anything that he has got, from a jack-knife to a quarter section of land.

It seems to me that there has been an awful smashing up of things in Princeton lately: seven weddings right straight along. By jove, I will have to hurry back if I am going to get a woman there. There is, however, some consolation in Lige's old saying that "there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught out," and you may have a mortgage on my hat if I bach' much longer.

I am sorry that the apples are all killed, for I was in hopes that I would have a chance to get some next winter. How do you work it about the farm now that Cullen has gone? Do you keep a hired man, or do all the work yourself? I suppose you double bossee now, ain't you—

As to your shaking while on a buffalo hunt, there is no danger of that. You could not get the hang of it in so short a time. It will be worth quite a pile to go, for you can wear home your moccasins and greasy overshirt and be a pretty big man when you get back.

You may send along all the papers that you have a mind to now. I don't get any except what I buy at the news office. We take one apiece in Holton, and Frank has all the benefit now. Why don't you and Chat [Charity] write once in a while.

PETER BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],  
July 22nd 1860

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

I have received your letter of June 25th. We left Topeka about four weeks ago, but I have been there since and happened to come across your letter or else I should still be in the dark in regard to your operations. I should think from your description that you must have some tall old times there.

I suppose there is about as much fun in lugging a musket as there is in "bullwhacking"<sup>37</sup> all day with a prairie team. As to "yanking out,"<sup>38</sup> I should think your class would get the hang of it after a while, so that you could come it over some of the older chaps.

There is not much going on here. Since Congress adjourned without admitting us [*i. e.*, Kansas territory as a new state], everybody gets mad if a word is said about politics, and they fall to cursing Old Buck [President James Buchanan] and the democracy generally, in a manner that would make a Christian's hair stand on end. There are some Douglas democrats here. There are to be three county commissioners and an assessor to be elected this fall, but they won't make much of a hurrah.

We have broken up about 90 acres of prairie this summer. We broke 50 at Topeka. We quarrelled with the boss down there, and he won't pay us. I am going to build a house this fall, dig a well, and fix up generally; that is, get ready for the woman. We are having an awful drouth here. Everything

37. Peter here refers to the Western practice of driving a team of oxen with a short-handled, long, heavy whip.

38. It is uncertain what Peter is alluding to here, but it is possible that "yanking out" might have been a contemporary expression for taking unauthorized leave from the military academy. The term "Yankee leave" was used by the American military services in the 19th century as an equivalent to "French leave."



is drying up. The prairie got afire yesterday in sight of my cabin and burnt over more than a thousand acres. You can get some idea by that of how dry it is. The old settlers say that they are in the habit of having such seasons here every three or four years. If that is the case, there is no use of trying to raise grain for a living.

You must have had some great times running around to Conventions, visiting, &c. Did you find any pretty girls in your travels? What kind of a looking piece is Amanda Towers? I have heard great boasts concerning her beauty. I would be devilish glad to learn that I had one good-looking cousin. Do you know why Sarah Olds never answered my letter? Did she ever get wind of my shooting her parting sermon at the ducks? I feel a little curious in regard to it, but as to the feelings that they bear towards me, I don't care a d--n what they are. If they don't like me, they are not under the least necessity of "putting."

I suppose that none of the teachers or professors ever get hold of your letters, do they? If not, I can tell you some yarns once in a while that I didn't like to write home where the women would see them. I don't know whether I will get back home this winter or not, but if I do, you may bet your hat that I won't come back here again without a "frow," for I have a notion of having some "bark" a little different from squaw. Write me soon.

PETER BRYANT

I have been trying to get Mark and Lige out here on a buffalo hunt this fall, but hardly think I will succeed. Cyrus did not come out as he talked. The Judge has got a "darter." [Insertion on side of first page.]

KICKAPOO [KANSAS TERRITORY], Aug. 12 [1860]

DEAR FATHER

I have received the land warrant and located it. It came by express to Topeka, and I left there with it on Wednesday morning. I have traveled about 80 miles since and 50 of it with an ox team.

It kept me dodging to get around here in time, but "the deed is did," and I feel a good deal better now. Tomorrow the Land Office is closed to pre-emptors.

Here they don't seem to think there will be much sold, but after the sales they will lay warrants to a large extent. Warrants are worth today \$157.00.

PETER BRYANT

I will write again when I get home.

PB

HOLTON, JACKSON COUNTY, K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY],  
November 11th, 1860

DEAR BROTHER [presumably CULLEN]

I have just received your letter of the 21st ult. First and foremost, I congratulate you on the election of "Honest Old Abe." It makes me feel good all over. 'Tis true I've been expecting it for some time, but when I heard the news from New York and Penn. and right from home, from the "Old Sucker State," I just "bollered" loud as I could put in for two hours and a half, away out here by myself on the prairie with nobody but "Deacon" and "Bully" to hear me, and I have not got over it yet. The fit comes on occasionally, and I yell out Hurrah for Old Abe! in a way that makes the heavens ring,

and the echo from the hills on either side catches it up and sends back, Hurrah for Old Abel! Old Abel! Abel! All nature rejoices. The sun shines clearer and warmer, and I actually believe on this occasion the grass will sprout. Evening before last the northern lights gave a grand display, and last night during the shower, lightning played strange antics across the sky, and old thunder bellowed Hurrah for Abel!

I tell you, if Kansas isn't glad nobody is. But this is not the end of good news. Last spring Jackson County went Democratic by 17 majority. Last Tuesday our side had 23 majority. I say, Hurrah for old Jackson! Altogether we will have a tearing up of things before this time next year. No more Land sales. Lots of money, and lots of grub. Hurrah for Old Abel!

Times are very hard, to use the words of the "Judge," hard as the limestone that underlies our real estate. And I think down on the Neosho, where "His Honor" lives, they are still worse. They are sending provisions and money here from the States. The headquarters are at Atchison. Gen. Pomeroy [is] commander, and if he does not make a good thing of it, you may have my hat. He was agent for the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society and made \$20,000 out of that, and you may bet that he has not forgotten how it was done.<sup>39</sup> Still, I hope for the best. I do not ask any thing for myself. I can get along well enough, but there are many poor men with large families that will have to have some help some way or other, and I do not think it is fair that speculators should pocket what the good people of Illinois give, as they think, to relieve the poor.

I have been digging a well lately. I had to go 50 feet. It was no small job. I have not got my house done yet. Money is so scarce that building is very slow work. I have made but \$15 in cash for the last three months, though I have been at work principally for myself. As to going home, that is out of the question. And when the woman that I used to talk about so much will be forthcoming, God only knows. We did not go on our buffalo hunt as we anticipated. This fall we had too much business to attend to. A great many went from here and brought in large quantities of meat. Buffaloes came in quite close to the Settlement this fall within 80 miles of here. There was one killed about five miles from here the other day, but he had got strayed away and lost.

Rackley is still in Holton and says that he will not leave until he makes enough to take him off. How did you dispose of your stock at home, or did you just leave it to take care of itself? They write me that they are still riding "Sal." We are all well.

PETER BRYANT

HOLTON, K[ANSAS] T[ERRITORY], Nov. 14, 1860

DEAR BROTHER [MARCUS]

Yesterday I received from you two papers and a letter. One had been on the road five days, another eight, and the letter nearly three weeks. Therefore, I don't see as it will be of any use for me to write anything for your paper. Besides, I am cross as a bear tonight and couldn't write anything pleasant if I should try.

I suppose Old Abe is elected and I am very glad of it. I hope we will have

39. Pomeroy was the model for the unscrupulous Senator Dismal in the novel *The Gilded Age* (1873), by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner.

better times now. Jackson County gave 17 Democratic majority last spring. This fall our side had 23 majority. Last night they had a great jollification in Holton. They made some big speeches and devoured quite a number of apples. The Democrats are a good deal down in the mouth.

You say that the folks talk of sending me some provision and other things. Well, if they send along a barrel or two of flour, they need not be afraid but what it will be accepted, and you say that you "have no doubt but what they would send along a little *"Spondulix"* if needed." I am very much afraid that it will be needed, though I had almost as soon be hung as ask father for any more. I owe Frank \$50 on that land yet, and he has finally got his arrangements made so that he has got to pay for his right off, and he wants the money. I have got \$25 salted down that I calculated to go home with along towards spring, but that plan will be knocked on the head. But what troubles me most is where I am going to get the rest. I have tried to sell a yoke of cattle, but I cannot do it for money. Then I tried to borrow. One man offered to lend me \$50 and take a mortgage on my place and 20 per cent interest.

I tell you I am devilish sick of this buying land on tick, and if I ever do it again, I want you to take your gun and shoot me. My place has cost me nearly \$600 besides the work I have done on it, and if anybody should offer me \$500 for it tonight, they would not have to offer but once. Here I am paying 10 per cent for money to buy land with that won't pay 2 per cent. Almost as good a bank to put money in as Bingham's Mill dam. But if I get out once, see if I get in again, and if I don't have better luck, tell father he may expect another begging letter in the course of a week.

As to that grub, if they take a notion to send any, tell them to send it as Kansas Relief, directed to Gen. H. C. Pomeroy, Agent—Atchison, K. T. Put on a private mark, and direct a letter to him stating the facts. By this means I will get it for 12½ cents per cwt. freightage. Otherwise it will be \$1.25 per cwt. I believe Dee has sent for some, and it would be well to have it come together. We did not go to Iowa. A man went from Holton and found it didn't pay.

I see by the papers that folks are giving money quite liberally in the eastern cities. I wish they would send some to a poor boy in this neck-o'-woods. I got a letter from Cullen a few days ago. He talks as though he had to work. I want you to get me four bushels of seed wheat, and I will try and get the money to pay you before you send it. I will send you the sermon in a day or two. All well.

PETER BRYANT

During early February of 1861 Peter Bryant made a trip from Holton to some place unknown. This may have been one of his frequent business trips to one of the Kansas "settlements," but it appears that he combined business with social pleasures, and it is possible that he was on a courting mission at this time. As indicated by previous letters, the need of a wife to establish a real home on the Kansas prairies was much on his mind during these days. In his absence, his friend and farming partner Frank Pomeroy took care of the farm and looked after Peter's livestock. Frank wrote to Peter as follows:

HOLTON [KANSAS]<sup>40</sup> Feb. 11th, 1861

DEAR PETER

Your letter I have neglected to answer until the present time. I am at the old cabin, but there has a decided change come over things here. As they are for the better, I have no fault to find. Chet, with his better part, arrived today. The "thing was did" one week ago today. The past week he has been around among the bretheren. The boys have followed him faithfully with their Band, but have not succeeded in bringing him out. They are expected here tonight. If they come, I suppose Brother Dee will invite them in. If he don't, they swear they—(darn the word, I can't spell it)<sup>41</sup> him two weeks.

You are undoubtedly having fine times with your little woman, if the sleighing is as good there as it is here. It has been fine sleighing for five weeks. Yesterday and today has been warmer. If it does not change before tomorrow, there will not be much snow left. Your money I sent all right the next day after I sent the note to Lewis. He refused to take it. I took it to Holton and got the gold but have not paid him yet. Consequently I can't send the note but presume I can next time I write. I have not received any money yet, but I presume I shall before long, as the boys have been paid and Eph. Parks has gone after the money. Gov has not been home, nor will he at present for the reason that they can't get a furlough. The Blacksmith's bill is paid, and Gordon says nothing, so I guess there will be no trouble with any bills outstanding. The school goes along all right.

Dave is almost the best friend I have on the Creek. He will pay his tax without any fuss now. Your rail maker I have not heard from. He has not made any rails, and I presume will not. Your stock does pretty well, though I think it does not do as well as it did last year. The reason, I think, is that the hay was cut too late. Rachel looks well. She will not calve before March, perhaps not before middle of that month. Large Jake had the diarrhea after you left, which made him very weak, but he recovered and is doing well. The rest of your stock is all right. I think we will feed them all corn before long. I have two weeks longer to teach. Thrashed my wheat today. Had 48 bushels. Chet says that he has not received his paper yet. He wishes me to tell you to send for it right away, if you have not. Write again to me. Tell all the news, not forgetting the girls.

Yours,  
FRANK

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., KANSAS  
March 10th 1861

DEAR BROTHER [presumably MARCUS]

I received your letter of February 17th several days ago, and I believe I had one before that was not answered, although I cannot find it now. My reason for not answering that is that I was so full of business that I could not find time. While I taught school I was at home only a little while Sunday, and then I generally had something else to attend to. My school is out now, and nobody is more glad of it than I. I am now engaged in the exciting game of a race for the Presidency; i. e., mauling rails, and you may take my

40. Although neither Frank nor Peter takes note of the event in these letters, Kansas was now no longer a territory, having been admitted to the Union on January 29, 1861.

41. Frank probably intends the word "charivari," the old custom of a noisy mock serenade on a couple's wedding night. Peter later refers to this same matter in his comments on Chet and his bride.

word for it, it is a "heap" more satisfactory than mauling sense into young ones' heads.

Judge Oakfield was here to see me last week. He got here Monday night about nine o'clock. He was pretty well fagged out and hungry as a bear. He had footed it from Grasshopper Falls [later, Valley Falls] (about 20 miles) that afternoon. He stayed until Wednesday morning. He could not reconcile himself to bachelordom and advised me to quit it as soon as possible— His talk about the apples and cider made me wish I was back home again— He thinks Emporia is a long ways ahead of Holton in every point of view and wanted I should sell out and go down there. I told him that I was far enough off from civilization now, and didn't care about shaking all the year round. He however made me promise to come down there on a visit next winter if I didn't *marry* before. I do not see as *famine* makes any alteration in him. He is the same jolly fellow that he always was.

We are having very fine weather now. Farmers that can get seed are very busy putting in their wheat. I never saw winter wheat look better than at present. Our cattle live on the prairie without hay. Some have not fed any for three weeks. I predict a smashing crop this year, and if you of Suckerdom are likely to starve, send to us for aid— Perhaps, though, it will be well enough not to count chickens until they are hatched.

There is considerable excitement just now in regard to who will be our U. S. Senators. There are a good many applicants, and it is very hard telling who is ahead. Jim Lane<sup>42</sup> stock was very high, but it seems to be falling. Pomeroy, I think, is gaining slowly. There is only one reason why I should like to see him senator. That is that he would work for our interest in regard to the Pacific R. R. —I believe the old cove is a good deal of a knave. Our Representative favors Lane and Delehay.<sup>43</sup> I rather prefer Lane and Judge Ewing<sup>44</sup> or Col. Phillips.<sup>45</sup> —However I have no favorite that I wish to bet on.

We have just received Old Abe's inaugural address. Its high tone and firm resolve smell strong of war.

Have you seen Thadeus Hyatt's letters to Gov. Andrews, Greeley, Sumner Conway, and others?<sup>46</sup> They are a pack of lies. Thadeus ought to be put in jail again, or sent to the Lunatic Asylum. The State is bad enough without lying about it. The scamp has kept thousands of emigrants from coming in here this spring.

Ten to one if we have a drouth again in twenty years.

P. BRYANT

42. James Henry Lane, the "grim chieftain," who came to Kansas in the spring of 1855 and played a spectacular role in territorial, state, and even national politics. He committed suicide in July, 1866.

43. Mark W. Delahay, whose political stock was high during this period because of a distant family connection with President Lincoln.

44. Thomas Ewing, Jr., who was on the Republican state ticket as chief justice.

45. Col. William A. Phillips, who came to Kansas in 1855 as correspondent for Greeley's *New York Tribune*. He was an ardent free-soiler.

46. Thadeus Hyatt was head of the Kansas Territorial Relief Committee set up to aid needy Kansans during the famine of 1860-1861. Andrews was Gov. John A. Andrew of Massachusetts; Sumner was Charles Sumner, Massachusetts senator; Conway was Moncreux Daniel Conway, Massachusetts clergyman and emancipationist.

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., KANSAS

April 7th, 1861

DEAR BROTHER [MARCUS]

I received your letter of March 26th yesterday. I am not in the habit of answering letters quite so soon after their arrival, but I got my hand in today and concluded that I would clean up the whole list, hence it is [remainder undecipherable]

I am just as full of work as I can stick nowadays, and it keeps coming thicker and faster and more of it all the time. I have no idea that I will ever get through.

We are having fine spring weather now. It was quite dry until about a week ago, when it commenced raining and has rained every other day since. My wheat is up and looks first-rate. I got two bushels of Club wheat and sowed it last week. I think it was the handsomest wheat that I ever saw. There is any amount of wheat in the country now; every farmer has some. I think Kansas will be fully tested this year in regard to her wheat-raising qualities. I am going to put in ten acres of corn and some potatoes. This, with the wheat, will be the extent of my farming this year. We are going to run a Company breaking team as heretofore, but will probably break mostly for ourselves. We have contracted for about fifty acres—don't get any cash—unless someone should happen to come full of dollars, the prospect is rather poor.

It was just two years ago yesterday that I left Princeton to go to Pikes Peak and have not got there yet, but for the past month I have had the greatest notion in the world of going; but driving team<sup>47</sup> is a dog's life, and God knows I have lived hard enough as it is. If I could only get the pay, I would be perfectly satisfied to let them go to Satan with the work.

You have probably heard of the election of our U.S. Senators. Jim Lane was ahead, and old tub-of-guts Pomeroy followed, as I was afraid he would. I don't know of any way except to grin and bear it, but there is one consolation: that is that Jackson County did not help elect him. The old cove hired a big house in Topeka and fitted it up in grand style and lived like a king, and those representatives who voted for him went there and boarded free gratis for nothing without paying a cent until election was over. Then S. C.(amp) vamosed and left the unfortunate reps to hunt other lodgings.

There has been a change in our post office affairs, and it is said that we will get our mail directly from Atchison after 1st of June.

It is rumored that there is a wild man in this neighborhood. Those who have seen him say that he is a heavy, thick-set man with red hair and whiskers and can run like a cuss. He sometimes gets after women and makes them scratch gravel as though they were running for a wager. The other day a couple of girls were out in a field driving up some cows. The chap saw them and made a break and caught one, and in a scuffle she bit off one of his fingers. The next day the girl's father hunted all day for the fellow without success.

47. After the Atchison and St. Joseph railroad was finished, in 1860, the freighting business from Atchison (the westernmost point of railroad connections with the East) enjoyed a definite boom. In 1865 "vacant ground around the town was dotted with the encampments of emigrants and freighters, and the levee was crowded with goods for the mines."—Peter Beckman, "The Overland Trade and Atchison's Beginnings," *Territorial Kansas*, p. 156. By "driving team," Peter apparently means working in this freighting business.

He don't wear any clothes except a coat. This is the yarn, and it is current here. However, you may do as you please about believing it.

Now in regard to your question about Chet's "gal." Well, in the first place, she is a Methodist and chock full of Jesus just like himself, fair complexion, medium size, shows her teeth a good deal, dresses pretty neat, tolerably good looking, and has a good-sized ankle, higher, deponent knoweth not.

P. BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON COUNTY, KANSAS.

April 7th 1861

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

I have not had a letter from you for a long time, but that matters not. I have got time to write today, and the devil only knows when I will have again.

I am chock full of work now, and every day it comes thicker and faster and more of it. I had an idea *when I was a boy* that after I got to be twenty-one I wouldn't work so devilish hard as I did at that time, but I find that I was sadly mistaken. I believe that I have done more work since I left home than I ever did all put together on Cyrus's farm, and yet when I look around I can hardly see where I have made a mark. If a fellow comes here without anything and expects to make a farm without doing a good deal of hard work, he slips up on it like thunder.

In regard to my matrimonial prospects, they are not half as bright as they were three years ago. Gods! I thought then that I should certainly have some bark long ere this, but as Burns says, "The best laid plans of mice and men, gang aft agley." And now I don't know as I shall have any for three years to come. By the bye, 'tis just two years ago today since we bid each other good-bye at Bill Bony Grove.<sup>48</sup> It seems to me as though it was but yesterday. Still, when I look back, what a h--l of a mess I have waded through: some of the toughest times and hardest grub that ever I saw—However, 'Grin & Bear It' is the firm I deal with, and I wouldn't flunk out and go home a poor devil as I am now, if Cyrus would give me his whole farm.

We are going to run our breaking team again this year and farm it a little. I have got in four acres of wheat and shall put in 10 or 12 of corn. The other boys each about the same as myself. The weather has been quite dry until a week past. Since then it has rained nearly every day. The grass is not as forward as it was last year.

The senatorial contest is ended, and our two pompous 'Generals' Lane and Pomeroy have been chosen. It is said there was any amount of wireworking and "skulduggery" performed. Pomeroy moved to Topeka and fitted up an elegant mansion and boarded free gratis all the representatives that voted for him. Whether he fed them on "Aid" <sup>49</sup> or not, deponent knoweth not.

What do you think of Old Abe's plan of evacuating Forts Sumter and Pickens?<sup>50</sup> I don't like it at all. I can't endorse it in him any more than I

48. Bulbona Grove, in the western part of Bureau county, Illinois.

49. Pomeroy was Hyatt's assistant in the Kansas Territorial Relief Committee (see Footnote 46). There is evidence that some of the funds contributed to the committee for relief in Kansas found their way into Pomeroy's own pocket.

50. President Buchanan had left unsolved the problem of what to do about the Atlantic Coast forts, the "return" of which had been demanded by the Southern states. After consulting with military advisers and the cabinet, Lincoln had apparently decided, by March 16, that the forts should be evacuated. He gave no order, but the newspapers, as a result of unofficial announcements made by his friend Ward Lamon, were stating that the evacuations had been definitely decided upon. Peter no doubt read the newspaper statements and of course could not know that by the date of this letter Lincoln had changed his mind and had

could in Old Buck. It seems to me that they might be reinforced. If he has not got the power, let him take the responsibility, the whole North will back him. When it comes to getting down and licking spittle for the d---d hounds, I am greatly opposed to it. My way would be to "coerce" them and hang every d---d traitor if I had to clean out the whole country.

Judge Oakfield was here to see me not long since. He said that a few days before that Peter Sweet, while starting out of Leavenworth for Texas, was kicked by a horse and had his leg broken. He had been living pretty high . . . and had got his blood in a bad state, and his leg began to mortify, and they didn't know but it would have to be amputated. Chet is chock full of Jesus and is running a Methodist girl pretty hard. . . .

P. BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON COUNTY, KANSAS  
April 21st 1861

DEAR FATHER

I received your letter of March 31st several days since.

We are having very fine weather now although rather warm for hard work. The grass grows very fast and our cattle got fat as hogs. —In that respect I think we have the advantage over Northern Illinois, for we feed our cattle a little corn during winter and turn them out and get them fat on grass and get them into market before you get done feeding hay.

We have not planted any corn yet. In fact, we are rather behind hand with our farm work in consequence of having so much fence to build. We are going to put in about 10 acres each. I have got nearly four acres of as hand-some wheat as I ever saw.

We put in our garden stuff some time ago and have got corn, onions, peas, potatoes, and melons up and nicely growing. My cow has got well and quite fat. She gives about eight quarts of milk per day. I think you do her great injustice in calling her an "old cow," for she is but very little over two years old.

Secession is the all-absorbing topic here, and the capture of Ft. Sumter produces a good deal of sensation. We have organized a military company in Holton, and it is said there are about to be two more organized in the County. Every man that is capable of lugging a musket is itching for a fight. We have two or three secessionists among us, but they have to keep pretty still or they would get their walking papers. The troops have all withdrawn from the frontier, and the Kiowas range within a hundred miles of us. There is no telling what day they may be in here. Besides that, we are somewhat suspicious of the loyalty of Missouri. There are three secession military companies at St. Jo and several others along down the river. They threaten to tear up the H. & St. Jo R.R.<sup>51</sup> to prevent the troops from Ft. Kearney from going to Washington. In case Missouri should go with the South, Ft. Leavenworth is in a rather precarious situation. The troops are gone, and there is no one there except the quartermaster and a few laborers who have charge of about

sent the ill-fated expedition under David D. Porter to reinforce Sumter and Pickens. Sumter was fired on April 12 and surrendered April 14.—David M. Porter, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (New Haven, Conn., 1942), pp. 356-366.

51. The Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad. Begun in 1857, it was, up to 1860, "the only road to reach the Missouri River," and it "secured a monopoly on the carrying of goods from the Mississippi to the Missouri on the way to the Far West."—Robert Edgar Riegel, *The Story of the Western Railroads* (New York, 1926), p. 276.



thirty pieces of artillery and a thousand stand of small arms. Last Thursday a boat came up to Leavenworth with the secession flag flying at the masthead. This roused the ire of the Union boys, and they sent to the captain a desire that he should take it down. He refused. They then got out the "Kickapoo Baby," planted it on the levee, and loaded it, and told the captain that "if he didn't haul that d---d thing down and run up the stars and stripes in less than ten minutes, they would blow him to h---l." This was argument enough. Cap. improved his time, and in less than *three* minutes the Union flag was unfurled and floated proudly in the breeze, and such a hurrah as burst from that crowd never greeted the vile rattlesnake. —Hoping we may soon have a fight, I am

Yours affectionately

P. BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., KANSAS

May 9th 1861

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

I received your letter of Apr. 7th about a week ago. Today we are having a rainy day, and I am squaring up my correspondence, and this letter is a part of the proceeds.

This is a great country, but things are apt to be carried to extremes; this morning the weather was delightful, balmy and warm; about the middle of the forenoon a little cloud about as big as your hand made its appearance in the northwest, and in less than an hour it rained and hailed and poured down water which ran on the prairies in streamlets large enough to turn a small mill. It would have made us grin to have seen the like last summer. I do not anticipate any trouble by drouth this season, but if we are not drowned out we will be fortunate.

There is nothing talked about here except war, and the boys of '56 fairly itch for a fight. They have got a grudge against Missouri and the South that they will never forget until it is wiped out in blood. We have organized a Volunteer Rifle Company in Holton and are awaiting orders from Gov. Robinson.<sup>52</sup> It is said that the President issued a requisition to him for two regiments. If that is the case, I should not be surprised if we had to march soon.

Our Capt. is Wm. F. Creitz,<sup>53</sup> a captain in the troubles of '56 and the prince of devils in a fight and of good fellows in a frolic, and as much of an abolitionist as Lovejoy or John Brown dare be. Your dear brother has the honor of being first lieutenant, a d---d ticklish place in time of a charge, and he may find some chewed bread in his boots afterward, but never-the-less would like to see how it would seem. Dave Rackley is 2nd Lieutenant and Frank 3rd.

52. Dr. Charles Robinson, of Fitchburg, Mass., who became governor when the state entered the Union early in 1861.

53. William F. Creitz, captain of the Holton volunteer rifle company, shortly afterward raised recruits for the Kansas cavalry forces being organized. Peter was too poor to buy a horse to follow his idol into state service (see letter of September 1, 1861), but Creitz was commissioned first lieutenant of Company A, Fifth regiment, Kansas volunteer cavalry, on July 10, 1861. Promoted to captain on September 11, 1861, he distinguished himself in several early actions, particularly by his bold and resourceful defense of his regimental supply train on a long and dangerous march to join the Army of the Southwest in Arkansas. With a supply-train escort of 150 men, Captain Creitz overthrew an Arkansas cavalry regiment, routed the 15th Texas cavalry rangers, captured a guerrilla company and supplies, and eluded a large body of pursuing Confederate cavalry. Creitz's detachment had been given up as lost, but because of its "gallant fight," the regiment was congratulated by General Osterhaus, division commander, for remarkable bravery and skill. Creitz was wounded at the Battle of Helena, Ark., on July 4, 1863. He was mustered out August 11, 1864, at Leavenworth.

I don't want you to feel bad in the least because I have got a lieutenancy before you have, but you must remember that I am the *oldest*.

Do you think the Cadets have a chance to see any active service? What do you suppose Mother would say if both of her boys should become fighting cocks? Have you seen the Princeton [Ill.] papers? I tell you old Bureau [county] shelled out the volunteers with a vengeance. She raised seven companies, and I presume some of them are in Washington before now. I have not seen the muster rolls and don't know who has gone. I hardly know what to think of M. [Missouri], whether she will secede or not. They are organizing and arming a great many companies just across the river, and you may bet we are not behind them in that respect. I will wager my hat that there are 10,000 men in military organizations in Kansas today, and if Missouri thinks she would like to thrash us, just let her go in. The Big Muddy [Missouri river] wouldn't stop us this time. Are any of the Southern Cadets in the Academy [West Point] now? Father writes me that he is going east this summer. He will probably give you a call. I am devilishly in hopes that our company will be sent east. I would manage to stop at Princeton an hour or two.

Our crops look first-rate, but I don't know as they will do us any good, for all three of us are "stuck."

P. BRYANT

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., KANSAS

Sept. 1st 1861

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

I received a letter from you a good while ago dated June 17th, but I've been so busy ever since that I have not answered it. Perhaps you would like to know what I find to do. There is *enough* to do if a fellow has a mind to take hold of it.

I didn't go into the army as you probably expected, and as I expected to one while. I'll tell you why. When we first organized a company here, we offered our services to the Governor, and he wouldn't have us. Then our Captain got authority to raise recruits for the 3rd regiment, and two days before we were to report at headquarters, it was changed into a cavalry company, and I was too d---d poor to buy a horse, so I was out again. There was about 30 went from here. D[ave] Rackley went with them. I was as mad as h--l because I couldn't go, but perhaps it is all for the best. The fellows have to stick to it devilish close, and there is no dodging off to run home to see the babies.

But I suppose you've heard of "*Jayhawkers*," haven't you? (The secesh in S. W. Missouri have.) They are curious 'cusses.' I tell you what 'tis, Cull. It is a nice thing to hear the bullets whistle provided they don't get near enough to cut the hide. It is nice to make them whistle so they *do* cut the bark. Again it affords infinite pleasure to be straddle of something that will get over ground like h--l greased if the Texas devils are after you at the ratio of 200 to 25. But the best of all is for about fifty of said "Jay-hawkers" to get after three or four hundred Missourians, then to see them "skeeadddle." I tell you 'tis royal fun.

It is fun, too, to stampede a big drove of horses for some jolly old "Secesh." It is a good idea, too, once in a while to get one or two of "Butler's contraband" <sup>54</sup> if you can get good. The two latter come under the head of "press-

54. Negro slaves. Gen. Benjamin Franklin Butler reasoned that since slaves were considered property, he was authorized to keep, as contraband of war, those Negroes who escaped from their owners to Union lines.

ing." Of course, we don't "press" much, but then we calculate to make the institution support itself. I hardly think it will be carried so extensively as it has heretofore. Our General (Jennison)<sup>55</sup> has received a colonelcy in the army, and a good many of the boys will go into his regiment. He is an independent sort of a fellow. He wouldn't go into the army and be under the command of any brigadier. What orders he don't make himself, he receives directly from Fremont.<sup>56</sup> His regiment are all mounted, called the Kansas Rangers. He finds horses (1000 that were pressed) and equipment. It is a d---d good place if a fellow wants to fight. He is always ready for a skirmish, and I never saw anyone so careful about losing his men. Many a cursing he has given the boys for being so reckless. No, say I, they will all get to hell a d---d sight sooner than they want to.

You think we don't know anything about drill. I don't suppose we could vie with you West Point boys, but by G-d we can shoot. —What d---d asses they made of themselves at Bull Run.<sup>57</sup> I swear 'tis a shame to our cause. I didn't think the North had so many d---d cowards. I like McClellan. I think he is grit. Sigel is bully, but he made a h---l of a mistake at Springfield.<sup>58</sup>

I am at home cutting hay now and attending to my fences. Don't know whether I shall go back again or not. When you write, send to Holton as usual. I may get it sometime if some "Secesh" don't force me to take passage in Old Charon's dugout to the Shades.

PETER

HOLTON, JACKSON CO., KANSAS  
Oct. 13th, 1861

DEAR BROTHER [CULLEN]

I have just received your letter of Sep. 22nd. I am sorry that you should suppose that I would be "going up the spout" at this interesting time. I intend no such thing, but mean to live and see the thing through if possible. You say that I was ambiguous in my last letter. I was not aware of it, though I swear I've forgotten what I did write.

Perhaps I didn't tell you that I had been to Missouri to see the country &c.; that my old gun had made rebels bite the dust; that I didn't get killed, and maybe other things; but I believe I hinted at them pretty d---d strong. That's all I'm going to do. Suppose I should be brought to trial here or hereafter for shooting a man, and you should come in as witness with papers stating over my signature that I did shoot him. Wouldn't I be in a d---d pretty mess! But I'll try and be plain this time.

Last May I received from Gov. Robinson a commission as 1st Lieutenant of Jackson County Union Guards. In July our Captain raised a company and went into the army, and I mustered about 50 men and went into Missouri. All the difference between us [was] he jayhawked under cover of Uncle Sam and I under a lieutenantcy from Governor R[obinson]. I marched when I d---d pleased; he, when he was told to. I kept my plunder (if I chose); he

55. Charles R. Jennison, a guerrilla leader, became colonel of the Seventh Kansas volunteer regiment.

56. Gen. John C. Fremont, since July commander of the Department of the West.

57. The Union defeat at the first battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861.

58. The Battle of Wilson's Creek, near Springfield, Mo., on August 10, 1861. Peter refers to Union Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel.

didn't. I took my pay as I went along; he, when he could get it. I have disbanded my squad; he has got to stick her till war is over.

I tell you Missouri has a d----d desolate look. Now settlers south of the river are very scarce. We cleaned out one side, and old Price<sup>59</sup> the other. He has about 15,000 that organized expressly for plunder. They are mostly d----d cowards. My boys have whipped them many a time where they outnumbered us two to one. I never ran but once. Then I was scouting with 25 men and ran into an ambush of 200 Texans. Then spurs came into play. Four of my men went under and seven or eight were wounded but got away. It is a wonder that we were not annihilated. They fired a volley of more than a hundred shots, and we were within 5 rods of them. Their horses were in a ravine about 20 rods back, else I probably would not be writing now. But I've got my pay.

I suppose you'd like to know what I think of war. I think it is a d----d hard way to make a living, and if a fellow has not got a constitution of iron, it will kill you. As to pecuniary matters, I didn't bring home a d----d red. Well, I didn't go to make money. I went to fight. When we disbanded, I gave up all that I had except a mule and pony to the Government boys. When I got to Leavenworth, I was out of money and hungry as the devil, and I had my mule put up and sold at auction. He brought \$17.50. I expected to get a hundred dollars for him when I took him, but jayhawkers were too plenty.

I've been home nearly a week now. I am going to Illinois in a fortnight if I can get money to take me there. I never saw money so d----d hard in my life. I have not written home since July, and they don't know where I am. If you write to any of them, don't say anything about my coming. I think I shall go with the army afterward if I can get into a cavalry company that suits me.

I don't like what you say about Fremont. Influential parties at Washington have tried their d----dest to cripple him and have well nigh succeeded. With few arms and little money, what could the man do that he has not? Then to take away 6 of his best regiments, to guard Washington when they already had 300,000 men—wasn't it d----d smart! I think you would do well to look to the Capital a little before you condemn Fremont.<sup>60</sup> As to Lexington, I know 'tis bad, but if Mulligan wanted reinforcements he should not have sent word to Fremont that he could hold it against all hell.<sup>61</sup> The

59. Maj. Gen. Sterling Price (1809-1867) of the Confederate forces. Price was governor of the State of Missouri 1853-1857; was made commander of the Missouri State Guard July 30, 1861; commanded the Army of the West July 2 to September 28, 1862.—Francis T. Miller, ed., *Photographic History of the Civil War* (New York), v. 10, p. 276.

60. As to where to put the blame for the Union defeats in the West during these months, there is a difference of opinion. Early historians, unlike Peter Bryant, tended to blame Fremont. Allan Nevins, however, in his biography of the Pathfinder, has this to say: "The difficulties of his [Fremont's] position, tossed as he suddenly was into a Department without organization, money, arms, or stores, without anything but raw recruits, asked not merely to raise and use armies but to equip them, left to shift largely for himself by an Administration intent upon the eastern front . . . can hardly be exaggerated. . . . Grant himself might have failed."—Fremont: *Pathfinder of the West* (New York, 1939), pp. 548, 549. Fremont relinquished his command, by order of President Lincoln, November 2, 1861.

61. At the Battle of Lexington, Mo., September 12-20, 1861, Col. James A. Mulligan of the 23d Illinois regiment, took command as senior colonel of the Union forces. With 3,500 men he held out for eight days against Confederate Gen. Sterling Price and 30,000. When reinforcements failed to arrive from Jefferson City, Mexico, Mo., or northwest Missouri, and the outnumbered garrison of the supply depot were surrounded and faced with annihilation by the closely besieging Confederates, Mulligan surrendered on honorable terms.—R. U. Johnson and C. C. Buel, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1884-1887), v. 1, pp. 307-313.

troops have not lost their confidence in the man yet [i. e., Fremont]. When I left, there was talk of his being removed, and it caused great excitement, and they swore if he was turned out they would disband and go home. If the administration wants to see this thing go on, for God's sake let them help him a little. Don't write again until you hear from me.

PETER BRYANT

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