The Letters of Samuel James Reader, 1861-1863

Pioneer of Soldier Township, Shawnee County

I. INTRODUCTION

ON JULY 26, 1855, Samuel James Reader, a boy of nineteen, drove his claim stakes on a tract of land situated about a mile west of the now extinct Proslavery town of Indianola, and about two miles northwest of present North Topeka. He and his sister Elizabeth had come to Kansas two months before with their Aunt Eliza and her husband, Joseph M. Cole, who purchased a claim adjoining the Indianola townsite. As a Free-State man, Samuel Reader took part in some of the border warfare and was with Gen. James H. Lane at the first day’s battle at Hickory Point in 1856. He was a member of a Topeka militia company which fought against Gen. Sterling Price during the Confederate raid of 1864. He was captured in the Battle of the Big Blue but managed to escape a few days later while being taken to Texas for imprisonment. Aside from these exciting events he lived quietly on his farm.

Before coming to Kansas Reader was not greatly interested in education, and neglected an opportunity to attend college. However, after getting settled on the farm he continued a study of French, and acquired a working knowledge of shorthand, in addition to doing much reading. His early desire was to become an artist and he spent much of his spare time in sketching with pencil and brush.

When Reader was thirteen years old he began to keep a private journal, and from September 16, 1849, to a few months before his death on September 15, 1914, he faithfully recorded daily happenings. With the exception of volume I, covering a period of three and a half years or up to June 1, 1853, and volume IV from January, 1858, to January 25, 1860, which were destroyed by fire in April, 1890, the diary is complete. The books have been deposited with the Kansas State Historical Society by Elizabeth Reader, a daughter, who now lives in San Diego, Cal.

1. A biographical sketch of Samuel J. Reader may be found in George A. Root’s “The First Day’s Battle at Hickory Point,” The Kansas Historical Quarterly, v. 1, pp. 23, 29.

2. Indianola was situated at the crossing of Soldier creek, a mile and a half from one of Papai’s ferry crossings on the Kansas river, and was on the road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley. The land for the townsite was purchased by H. D. McMeekin of Louis Veaux, a half-breed, and the town was laid out in November, 1854, the proprietors being John E. Baker, H. D. McMeekin and George Perrin. A good frame hotel and other buildings were erected and the town attained quite a degree of prosperity, but like many of its neighbors, it was soon overshadowed by Topeka. It is now extinct. — A. T. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas (Chicago, 1889), p. 534.
The diary is a unique historical document. The entries are a mingling of English, French and shorthand, illustrated in many instances with pencil, pen, and water-color sketches. In addition to recording everyday events Reader copied in his diary extracts from and summaries of letters to his father, his half-brother Frank, his half-sisters Mary Ellen and Martha in Pennsylvania, his relatives in Illinois, his Indianola friends at the front, and others. These letters, covering a period from January, 1861, to March, 1863, are printed below. They record the writer's views on national affairs and the conduct of the war, and they give interesting accounts of happenings in a typical Kansas frontier town.

II. THE LETTERS ASRecordedin the Reader Diary
[To His Father, Francis Reader, in Pennsylvania]

[January 13, 1861.]

There appears to be a great excitement in the South in consequence of the election of “Old Honest Abe Lincoln” as president of the U.S. I hope the N[orth] will make no more compromises or in any manner directly or indirectly recede one inch from their present position; for there appears to be a daily increasing opposition feeling against Slavery, in the N and concessions to the S[outh] would not only be disgraceful to us but would not cure the matter at issue; as it would be sure to come up again at some future time and with perhaps more disastrous results to both parties. I must say for myself, that secession on the part of the S is viewed by me with much pleasure. Perhaps you will call these “treasonable feelings,” but it is impossible for me to look with indifference on the monstrous and abominable system of human slavery in the S; and to consider that those men who uphold and try to perpetuate this enslavement of a weak and unfortunate people, are fellow citizens. I should look upon it as very little better were we confederated with Pirates & Robbers. But I have said enough about this matter especially as I rather think you will not agree with me in all my political ideas.

[To His Half-Brother Francis (Frank) Reader]

[March 25, 1861.]

You ask me how I like Lincoln’s Inaugural address. On many points I think it is a very good one. There appears to be honesty in all he says: The views he takes of the decisions of the Supreme Court should be obvious to every one But I think he is too sanguine in thinking the Seceded States can be brought back by holding the
forts collecting the revenue and acts of a like nature. They have left the Union, openly declared their independence and formed a "Southern Confederacy" and it seems very improbable to me that they can be won back by occupying a few military posts and fortifications along the seacoast. It would tend to exasperate but not subdue them; and actual coercion (which the President has wisely repudiated) would undoubtedly be successful in overcoming them, but disastrous in the end and wholly inadvisable. We have triumphed and ought to show ourselves generous victors. Anglo-Saxon blood courses in their veins the same as our own, and although they foster in their midst the most atrocious system the sun shines upon within the pale of civilization, we ought to remember that many of them have been taught from their infancy to look upon it as an institution by no means unjust or wicked. Therefore it is my humble opinion that they should be allowed to govern themselves as they see proper, thus exploding the idea they have, that they are so valuable to the North that we wish to keep them in the Union against their wishes for our own benefit, and also cast from ourselves the odium of being confederated with States advocating and practising human slavery. I know that the great majority of the Northern people are for saving the Union, but I should be in favor of principle and right before self interest or fear of dissolution.

The two great sections N & S are as unfit to live under the same government as Europeans and the Arabs of the desert to be governed by the same laws. As far as I can learn a man who is in favor of abolishing slavery is in danger of maltreatment and even death in the South; and the press, that index of intellectual progress and liberty is as jealously guarded as it is in despotic France while their publications and demagogues have the privilege of placing their arguments and opinions before the people of the North. Such I cannot call a Free government. You ask my opinion as to making an honorable Compromise with the slave states to bring them back in the Union. I will say that I am emphatically against any compromise whatever for no honorable one is possible while the South is in its present attitude. The N. has given way too much to them already for instance the Fugitive Slave law to which no man of genuine humanity would comply when brought to the test unless his mind should be biased in favor of the "Peculiar institution" or the fear of the law should out weigh his conscience. You have asked me to give my opinion on these questions and I have candidly done so. I am well aware that such sentiments are not
popular either N. or S., but nevertheless they are my honest convictions, although I may be in error.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]  
[April 21, 1861.]

Dear brother

I received your letter about one week ago and would have answered it sooner but my business for the last few weeks has been so pressing a nature that it became necessary for me to defer writing until the present. We are all in good health and we have but little sickness in the neighborhood.

Times are very hard and scarcely any money in circulation. The farmers have commenced their spring work, and every thing favors an abundant yield in consequence of several very fine showers a few weeks ago. Spring wheat looks remarkably well as far as I have seen but if it proves a failure this year I shall be tempted to give up experimenting upon it, as I have twice failed in Kansas and on the last trial lost the seed. For the last few days the news from the South have been of the most exciting character. It seems that Civil War with its attendant miseries will be upon us in a short time. As I said before, I am not sorry to see the secession of the slave states and should not like to see them brought back either by persuasion or force. At the same time this uprising of a powerful military force at the North may have the salutary effect of keeping the rampant Fire eaters from making a raid upon the Federal Capital, or some similar aggression upon the border Free States. Three companies have been raised at Topeka the other day and although the President has not called upon us for troops, the Gov. has offered 1000 men. Have you or do you intend to volunteer? What is your opinion about the justice or expediency of the Administration? Please answer these queries in your next letter. I believe I have nothing more of importance to write. My love to my Father my sisters and your self. Your affectionate brother

Samuel J. Reader

---

3. The confederate attack on Fort Sumter began April 12. The fort surrendered, and on April 15 President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers.

4. D. W. Wilder, The Annals of Kansas (Topeka, 1886), p. 317, reported that by April 25 military companies were organized in nearly every county.
My Dear brother Frank

Day before yesterday I received a long and pleasing letter from you enclosed in a beautiful Union envelope. Your letter found us all well &c &c. But little war excitement exists in our little town. Indiana was laid out as a town site under Pro-slavery auspices and as a natural consequence the maj. of its inhabitants are Slaveryites and avowed secessionists. This clan (some of whom were active in cooperating with the Border Ruffian element of Mo. in the K[ansas] war), have been trying to get up an Independent Volunteer Co., and it has by some means leaked out that their intention is to organize if possible enough for a company, draw their arms from the state, and when Mo. secedes, which they confidently expect, they will be prepared to give them aid and comfort. In consequence of this disclosure a number of us, of the Republicans had a private meeting last Frid[ay] night, in which it was decided to watch these fellows and if they make any demonstration, to take necessary measures to crush out the design. It gives me much pleasure to hear that you have volunteered and that you hold a Commission in your company. I believe it is the duty of every man to be prepared if it comes to the worst to give the traitors their just deserts. Bad as war is it is still better than subjection by the hands of the S rebels. When the Cotton States seceded, and a prospect of the rest of the Slave States following I felt the same relief that a person would in separating from another infected with an infectious disease; and for my part would have been willing to have let them alone in their iniquity believing that slavery would eventually die out of its self in the onward march of civilization, but it now appears that they want to inaugurate the "irrepressible conflict" in their own way by taking or destroying the National Capital and then carrying their arms north and subduing all before them. Let the issue then be squarely stated that all must be free or all slave states and let the fortunes of war decide. I was much interested in reading the comments on the 4 page of the N Y Tribune of last week. I begin to hope that slavery, the cause of our present troubles will receive a lasting and final overthrow. But I should not be in favor of confiscating the rightful property of the Secessionists in case they should be overcome. Many of them must necessarily be misguided and many more obliged to aid the traitors for fear of personal violence. Let the
punishment then fall on the heads of the ambitious demagogues and office seekers who started the movement. Jim Lane has returned to Kansas. He was at Topeka the other day. They say he has orders from Headquarters to retake the forts seized by the Secessionist Indians, and also forts in Ar[kansas]. He will find all the men necessary for the purpose in this state which will be several thousands— As Ar[kansas] has seceded he will probably meet with considerable resistance in that State.5 You want me to answer the questions I propounded to you in my last. Here is my answer "I think as you do, that Lincoln has taken the right way and the only way he can take consistent with the position in which he is placed, to settle the difficulty, and all those hot headed men at the N who wish to hurry things along without reason, deserve the censure of all true citizens. I have not volunteered yet because we cannot get men enough in this neighborhood who are willing to volunteer to make a full company—(40 men)— And Topeka is so far that it is not possible for me to join a Co. there. I must close for want of space. Write soon &c. My love to all.

Samuel J. Reader.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[June 2, 1861.]

D. Bro:

I received your letter of May 21, on the 29th of the same month, and having a few leisure moments for the first time since its arrival have embraced them in order to answer your favor. We are all in tolerable health with perhaps a slight exception in the case of Sister E[liza]. who has not felt perfectly well for the last few days. In my last I gave you a flattering account of our prospects for a crop, but within a few days past the farming community have experienced much annoyance from the cut-worms. In some parts of the field I planted more than 3/4 of the corn crop has been destroyed. Of course replanting can be practiced to a certain extent but should these little pests continue their depredations 1 or 2 weeks longer we shall be in a very bad situation as regards farming. The weather has been wet and cool for the last few weeks. I have not seen the th'ire higher than 87° this year, (in the shade,) It stood at 111° one day last summer which you may well believe was rather warm.

5. It was reported that Lane had orders to lead a large force into Arkansas and to retake Fort Smith and all other government forts in Arkansas and Missouri.—_The Conservative, Leavenworth, May 11, 1861._ According to W. H. Stephens, "The Political Career of General James H. Lane," Kansas State Historical Society's Publications, v. III, p. 106, "Lane had no military authority."
Our local news is not important. Only 1 regiment of K. troops has been accepted by the President. Many rumors are afloat in regard to the supposed movements of Gen. J. H. Lane, but nothing is definitely known about his future operations so far. A train loaded with arms and provisions was overhauled at Topeka, the other day. The arms were detained but the provisions were allowed to depart in peace. Some say the arms were being sent to the Indians in the S. part of Kansas and others that they were destined to the western hordes of savages. The arms are in good hands now, at any rate. Last evening I attended a meeting for the purpose of getting up a Volunteer Company. It being the second time only that we have met for such a purpose. Fourteen gave in their names and we expect as many more will join at our next meeting. I was appointed one of a Committee to form our By Laws.

The Secessionists of this place keep remarkably quiet. One of their number got spiritually excited the other day and threatened to kill his wife with a hatchet and as no Crittenden Compromiser was present to adjust their difficulty, secession was a natural consequence, but I am happy to say a reconstruction of the Union has subsequently taken place and they can now carry on their “domestic institutions” in their own way. Perhaps this practical part of secession in their case was not so pleasant as the theoretical.

The latest news informs us that the President has called for 100,000 more men. Our Gov. cannot be blamed now for lack of energy at least. I am pleased to see you so enthusiastically attached to the Union and in this feeling I now heartily concur with you because I think the people of the North have their eyes opened at last and will not vent their just indignation so much upon the heads of our misdirected fellow citizens of the S. as upon their hateful system of Slavery. That and that alone I want to see destroyed root and branch!!! I am also glad to hear that you are not troubled with traitors in your neighborhood. I should be happy if I could make a similar assertion of our neighbors here. It appears that you intend to make a real soldier of yourself, and perhaps win glory on some bloody field, in sustaining the stars & stripes. Before this letter reaches its destination it may be that you have left Home and friends and marched out to battle against the foes of our Gov. under this last requisition for troops. I feel proud of my native State in

6. The first regiment of Kansas volunteer infantry was mustered into the service of the United States on June 3, 1861.—Andrus, op. cit., p. 189.
7. On May 8, 1861, President Lincoln called for 42,000 additional volunteers for three years and added ten regiments to the regular army.—Horace Greeley, The American Conflict (Hartford, O. D. Case & Co., 1864), v. I, p. 528.
SAMUEL J. READER'S WATER-COLOR PAINTING OF INDIANOLA, AS THE TOWN APPEARED IN 1861

Now extinct, the town was located about two and one-half miles northwest of North Topeka. The Indianola pictured above does not correspond in every detail with the Indianola described in Reader's letter of August 31, 1865, which will be published in the succeeding issue of the Quarterly. The original drawing measures fifteen inches by seven inches.
the highest deg. for her patriotism and energy in the present crisis. I will be frank with you and say that I was almost as much surprised at the part taken by the Democrats N. in this struggle, as the slaveryites were themselves. I believed that if we came to blows with the S. the maj. of them would side with their party brethren or at the most stand neutral or give up everything in a base unmanly compromise. You made a just remark when you said you never wanted to see partyism so strong again. I am called a Rep. here but at our local elections I have several times voted for Dem’s when I thought they were more competent or honest but I think I would consider a long time before voting for an avowed Pro-slavery man. Our troubles here in 56 & 57 have implanted in my mind a most un-Christian-like hatred towards our Border Ruffian invaders, aiders and abettors. Well it appears you have chosen a mercantile calling. It is without doubt a money making business if carried on properly. For my part an agricultural life has the greatest charms for me; more especially in so fine a farming country as K’s possessing soil so rich and easy of tillage. Sister E[liana]. has not yet written to you partly on account of ill health, and in consequence of having most of her time employed in domestic affairs; her family being as you are aware tolerably large. So you must not think you are forgotten by her because of her silence. She will at the first favorable opportunity write you that long expected letter. She sends her love to you, her father and sisters. Dr. C[mphdoras] 8 says he would like to go in the U. S. navy as Surgeon (that having been his business on board a F[rench] man-of-war) if he had no family, as he always felt better every way on the sea, than on land. He is a true Rep. in every sense of the word and shows a praise-worthy intention of supporting the Gov. of his adopted Country but I hardly think he will go out of the State as some apprehension is felt about the Indians on our borders.

I will close for the present by sending my love to all. Your affectionate brother.

S. J. Reader.

8. Marie Antonin Eugene Jaques Cumpdoros was born in France September 6, 1825. He served from 1846 to 1851 as a surgeon in the French navy. Forced to leave his native land because of his Republican convictions he arrived in New York in 1852. Several years later he came to Kansas and settled at Indiana where he resumed the practice of medicine. In 1856 he married Eliza M. Reader. Four years later he accepted an appointment as assistant surgeon of the Second Indian regiment and served for eighteen months before resigning on account of ill health. He continued to live in Shawnee county, farming and practicing his profession until his death on April 6, 1881.—Fannie Cole, writing in the North Topeka Times, April 29, 1881.
Mon cher frere Frank:

Your letter of June 11 was duly received on the 19th, containing the joyful tidings of your excellent health & prospect of a bountiful crop. We are also in good health and I have not heard many complaints of sickness in the neighborhood. I have not heard of a solitary case of Chills & Fever yet. I dread it more than I do the traitors to our Gov. Our crops of all kinds look fine. Spring wheat has headed out and promises an abundant yield if the weather continues dry so the rust will not attack it. Corn now looks well & is safe from the worms. Some of it however will have to grow fast to get out of reach of the early frosts. I have some that is more than 3 ft high and some again that is not 3 inches high.

But few persons have orchards here and those who have set out trees cannot tell yet whether this is a good fruit growing country or not. My uncle Cole planted a peach orchard and set out 50 or 60 apple trees four years ago. The peach trees were all killed by the frost close to the ground. The apple trees look thrifty but have not blossomed yet. It is probable that this soil on the river bottom is too rich and low. About ½ of my claim is highland & all persons who have experience in such matters say it is well adapted for fruit trees. I have broken about 1 A. on one of the hills which is about 50 feet in height & intend to set out an orchard as soon as possible. Wild berries and grapes will be in abundance but the plums have about all “gone up.” Our weather has been quite warm & dry for the last few days but we have no fears of another drouth this year as the ground is thoroughly soaked with our Spring rains. Times are hard & dull here as well as elsewhere but I do not think our mercantile men complain of the scarcity of money as much as they did last season. The other day our Gov'r called upon all patriotic citizens to organize and report themselves as there is great reason to believe that K. will be invaded by the Cherokees & Osages. Our most important news has been the taking of Independence Mo by U S troops and the defeat of Gov Jackson and his traitorous crew at Booneville, but of course you will get all such news quicker & more reliable than by me. You gave a very interesting a/c of your

9. Fearing an invasion from Missouri, Gov. Charles Robinson on June 17, 1861, called upon all good citizens to organize themselves into military companies of not less than 35, nor more than 100 men, rank and file, and hold themselves in readiness to enter upon active service at call.—The Kansas State Journal, Lawrence, June 20, 1861.

10. On June 17, 1861, Gen. Lyon defeated Claiborne Jackson, Missouri governor and confederate commander, at Booneville.—Wilder, op. cit.
experience in camp life &c. I also received one of your local newspapers with a full a/c of the proceedings and upon the wrapper a device of our National flag with rather an unhealthy suggestion in regard to the traitor who should dare to tear it down. Well, we have plenty of fellows here who would not scruple to do it if they had a chance, but they are not so rampant as they were a few weeks ago and several of them have skulked into Mo. and joined the Seccessionists there who call themselves the “State Troops.” Our Company has been named “The Fremont Guards.” We have a company drill every Sat. P M and intend to have squad drills every evening except Sat & Sundays. I was elected Orderly Sergeant of the Company as it was supposed I had some understanding about military matters, having seen some little service in the “K[ansas]. war,” but my knowledge of such business is but limited. At our first meeting 14 gave in their names and the number has steadily increased at every subsequent meeting. I have 34 names now on the muster-roll, & I know of several persons who intend to join. I think we may safely calculate upon having 50 members within 2 weeks. I believe I have no more to write. My love to all.

Saml J. Reader.

P. S. What views does our Father take on the present state of affairs? I should be very happy to know his opinion from himself if it would not be asking too much.

S. J. R.

[To His Uncle Samuel James of La Harpe, Ill.]

June 30, 1861.

S James12 & all the friends:

The last letter from you was written to Lide and in it you said you had sent a letter to me some time before but which has never come to hand This letter of yours I answered but for fear it has never reached its destination I will repeat the most important parts: In regard to buying a right to sell washing machine we do not think it would pay here at this time &c &c We are all in pretty good health here and crops of all kinds look fine. Plenty of rain has fallen this season The people are not over excited here about the war. Our K[ansas]. news I need not attempt to give you as you can get it quicker through the telegraph. Our danger of an attack from the Indians S traitors of Mo & Ark. is considered probable by many

11. A Free-State company was organized at Indiana on February 9, 1856, with Joseph M. Cole as captain and Samuel Reader as first sergeant.—Reader’s “Diary,” v. III. Samuel Reader joined the Topeka company which went to the Nebraska line to escort Lane’s emigrant train into Kansas territory. He left Topeka with the company July 29, 1856, and returned home August 9.—Ibid. For Reader’s story, “The First Day’s Battle at Hickory Point,” edited by George A. Root, see The Kansas Historical Quarterly, v. 1, pp. 38-49.

12. Reader’s mother was a James.
but I have concluded that I can stay here as long as any other Abol’t. A short time ago the Union loving people of the neighborhood organized a M[ilitary] C[ompany]. called “The Fremont Guards.” I was elected Orderly Sergeant, the same office I held in the “Frying Pan Guards” in 56: that Free State Company which was fierce in peace, and gentle in war. At our next meeting we will select our uniform. I have over 30 names on the Muster-roll and our number increases at every meeting. The company has nary breast plates yet. Please write on receipt of this and give all the news &c. I can think of nothing more

My love & respects to all
S. J. R.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]
[July 18, 1861.]

D Bro.

It was with the greatest pleasure & I must add with considerable surprise that I received from you yesterday a letter dated in a Military camp [Camp Carlisle] informing me that you have enlisted for the war. If this war lasts as long as the Peloponnesian war of ancient Greece you will certainly have a chance to learn your trade well. I think you have acted entirely right and I expect to follow your example if a similar opportunity offers its self to me for our cause is certainly just & although war in the abstract is manifestly a great evil and presents many horrible & revolting features, it is our last resort to preserve our national existence. A great many members of the Fremont Guard’s would not be willing to leave their families and property to the tender mercies of the Secessionists and enter into the service of U. S. so there is not much probability of our company reaping laurels on the battle-field unless our State be invaded of which there is some apprehension. I am sorry to say that two of our men have with drawn from the company when we came to take the oath; we are glad they have shown their true colors so soon. For several weeks past we have had the Stars & Stripes floating over our little town and one of our most rabid Secessionists hoisted a small Union flag for a few days. These fellows have been drawing in their horns lately. Still they use treasonable language that would not be tolerated in many other places. With out a doubt they will act as spies when Ben McCulloch or some other traitor Chief makes an attack on Kansas.\textsuperscript{14} It is a significant fact that the

\textsuperscript{13} The Peloponnesian war lasted from 431 to 404 B.C.

\textsuperscript{14} Ben McCulloch was a confederate general.
4 groggeries which Indianola can boast of every one is kept by a "Secesher". Intemperance is the special vice of this neighborhood and it was fortunate for me that I belonged to the Temperance Society before I came to this wild & lawless region as it has kept me perfectly free from this baneful habit so far (Crops &c.). The news from Mo. has been very exciting for the last few days, but as you are doubtless posted as soon as we it will be useless for me to write anything in regard to it. I have nothing more of interest to write to you. Receive my best love & respects and the wish that you may acquit yourself honorably in the new position in which you are placed and pass safely through the many dangers and hardships of a soldiers life. Your affectionate brother

Samuel J. Reader

P. S. In your next will you please inform me how the "National Infantry" has enlisted as Va. Volunteers, also what length of time you expect to remain in your present Camp. What your daily duties are; your pay per mo. and all particulars that you think may be interesting to us civilians.

[To His Father Francis Reader]  
[July 24, 1861.]

Dear Father

Last week I received a letter from my Brother written from Camp. Carlisle & dated the 11th July informing me that he had enlisted with his Company as Va Volunteers during the war. I received this intelligence with some surprise & I must confess with a great deal of pleasure and pride at the bold stand he has taken in this hour of our country's peril. This letter I answered almost immediately & the next day received another letter from F[rank] dated on the 8 but was probably delayed on account of disturbances in Mo. This last one was written just before he started on the "War trail" & from it I learned that you was strongly opposed to his enlisting & he as strongly bent on doing his duty to his Country. He greatly deplored the seeming necessity of acting in opposition to your will, but appeared to think his honor would be compromised and a disgrace thrown upon his relations should he remain at home while his comrades would in all probability be covering themselves with glory in the field. For myself I know that such a situation would be unendurable to me and second only to imprisonment & we being brothers it is likely our feelings are similar on this subject. Far be it from me to uphold or excuse dis-
obedience to paternal authority for the aged and experienced have the unquestionable right & ability to guide and direct those who are under age, nevertheless in such cases as this a great deal ought to be overlooked and excused. Perhaps I am a little prejudiced in this view for I must admit that during our troubles in Kan. my Aunt always tried to dissuade me from taking any part in them. She felt as much interested in seeing Kan. come in as a free state as my self, but did not wish to have me incur any of the danger in making it so. I felt differently and although it gave me pain to see her & my sister's uneasiness, I could not refrain from thrice shouldering my rifle to aid in keeping the blight of Slavery from our Territory. Had he wished to enlist into the Regular service I would myself have used every argument in my power to dissuade him from such a step, as many demoralizing influences would be thrown around him if I may judge from what I have seen of the Regulars in this part of the Country, but there is a vast difference between them and patriotic Volunteers of the N[orth] especially when they are composed of friends and neighbors from the same vicinity & commanded by a man like Capt. L. E. Smith whom F[rank] represents as a model of temperance & morality. Such being the case, personal danger is the only thing that ought to give us any uneasiness and in this all we can do is to trust in Providence & hope for the best. War is a terrible way of settling our difficulties, but from the action Congress has taken in regard to Slaves owned by traitors, the other day, I believe this war will finally be a blessing to Humanity & universal progress. I envy F. his place in our patriotic Army and ardently wish I could stand shoulder to shoulder with him in his Company in showing the aristocratic plantation Nabobs that the N[orth] can not be trifled with. Night before last we heard that McDoWells force was entirely routed by the Secessionists.15 We hear however from last nights mail that it is not so bad as was represented at first, still the best is bad enough. We are all in tolerable health only. Aunt E & both of her children were attacked with the headache last night but not seriously. For my part I am not in a condition to fight or fly should the enemy come upon us, as I have cut my foot with an axe the other day while making fence & I will be confined to the house for several days. Our weather is pleasant with plenty of rain. Corn looks fine vegetables are flourishing. The inhabitants here are not much excited about the war! We are used to civil war you know. The seceshers in Ind[ian]a. are getting a little scared. One

15. The Battle of Bull Run occurred July 21, 1861. In this battle the union army under Gen. Irwin McDowell was routed by the confederates.
of the most rabid traitors of the lot was declaring his Union sentiments to the Dr [Campdoras] last night. He expressed himself as being very sorry for the slaughter of the Northern men at Bulls Run last Sund. These mushroom patriots have taken this step to avoid being taken care of by the T[opeka] boys as spies and dangerous subjects generally. While writing this letter I have received another from F dated July 2 and containing a miniature of himself in uniform. My brother-in-law [Dr. Campdoras] and several others who have seen it think I resemble the m. strongly while my A[unt] & sister think otherwise. I look upon it as a great treasure at this time. This letter bears the post mark of Indianapolis Ind which accounts for its delay. I would write again to F[rank] immediately but hardly know where to direct If you write to him soon please mention the receipt of these two last letters. I have no more. Please write soon. I send my love to my sisters relatives & yourself. Your affectionate son

Samuel J. Reader.

[To His Uncle Samuel James]

[August 4, 1861.]

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES:

I received a letter from Uncle S[amuel] dated July 25 the other day & now hasten to answer it. We are all in the enjoyment of our usual health. Times are very hard of course but we will not starve this year certain. Our corn crop looks splendid and almost all vegetables the same. Wheat has been an average crop, I raised 1½ acres of Spring wheat but have not yet threshed it. Aunt L[Eliza] feels much better when she sees wheat stacks. The weather has been rainy for sometime past but is now dry and hot. It was over 100° yesterday in the shade. Ind[ianola]. has improved some. A hotel 60 x 40 was put up last Spring by a Pro-Slavery secessionist, and a new Drug-store and P O by a Republican. The news of McDowell's defeat was received here (telegraph[ed] via Le'n [Leavenworth]) two days after (23d) the battle causing much despondency to the Union men and great joy to "Seceshers." It has certainly been a great check to our army but we must hope that it will turn out for the best in putting our officers more on their guard in the future & who knows that it will not cause slavery to be abolished by proclamation. I believe the N people are drifting slowly but surely to that point. I feel proud that a senator of Kansas first presented a Bill to that effect, but even if it fails I believe that with the total de-
feat of the Rebels will be the final destruction of Slavery. I do not wish to see the rightful property of the S[outh] confiscated for many of them doubtless have been forced into the vortex of Secession by circumstances over which they had no control, & by the misrepresentations of their Leaders. All I want is the entire destruction of human slavery. My sentiments are almost exactly expressed in a letter from G[errit]. Smith to the N. Y. T[ribune], of July 20. Aunt Lide[Eliza] says she wants to live to see the day when not a slave exists in our Union. I must here detail an account of the course taken by my half-brother Frank in regard to the war; Last Spring we began a correspondence which we have continued until the present time. Before open hostilities had begun he was like his father, in favor of compromising with the traitors and trying to coax them back, but after the fall of Ft. Sumpter [Sumter] he joined a M[ilitary] Co. which was raised in his neighborhood called the N. I. [National infantry?] in which he was elected color-bearer. They acted as a Home Guard (Gov[ernment] not requiring their services at that time from Penn.) until about the middle of June when the acting Gov. of Va. (Gov. P.) requested this Co to enlist as Va. V. during the war. Capt. L. E. Smith accepted the invitation. Frank says our Father was strongly opposed to his going and told him he should not go, for awhile, but he worked away till he got his consent. He is now in Va at C[amp], Carlisle near Wheeling, or was at last accounts. I do not know yet whether he took part in the battle of Bulls Run or not. He sent me his miniature taken when in uniform. The Dr. [Campdoras] & most people who have seen it, think he strongly resembles me.

Well I have not gone to the war yet, and likely will not soon. A Co. from Ogden,17 called the "Mud-sills" camped here yesterday on their way to be mustered into service. I am well acquainted with the 1st Lieut. (John Parsons) we having served in the same Co. in the K. war, 1856.18 He urged me strongly to go with them. We have our Co. drill every Sat. P. M. and are making progress and getting acquainted with our several duties. We arm ourselves for the time being. Some fears exist in regard to the Indians on our frontier but I hope they are groundless. I send you the Drs Topeka paper of yesterday with an account of this matter and an interesting description of Jim Lane which is to the life. When I served under him at H[ickory]- Point his uniform was, a coarse white felt hat a mixed blue & gray over-shirt much the worse for wear with an

17. Ogden, a town in Riley county.
ordinary pair of boots & pants; His arms consisted of a six in. Colt's revolver and a butcher knife hanging from his belt. He has what A[unt]. E[liza]. calls a "pack-saddle" nose, sharp and thin face and eyes which he keeps so nearly closed that it is almost impossible to tell the color of them. When I came home from that raid I drew a picture of him from memory which was destroyed a short time ago. No more &c.

S. J. Reader.

P. S. Aunt L. [Eliza] wants you in your next to inform her about the situation, occupation, health &c of brother Joseph & family where Minerva's husband is and all particulars that you think would be of interest to her. Please write soon and [send] me the war news of L[a] H[arpe]. Who have enlisted from your town &c.

S. J. Reader

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[August 11, 1861.]

Dear Brother:

Yours of July 29 was duly rec'd & gave me much pleasure in informing me of your excellent health & prosperity in your new calling; Its arrival also removed some little uneasiness I had begun to feel for fear you had been killed or maimed at some of the recent engagements in your present vicinity. The Union forces of W. Va certainly did do a splendid thing when they chased the vile traitors from that part of the State. Will not the Slave holding aristocrats begin to learn after a while that there is some little fight in men who labor for a living; that if slow to get angry they will be terrible in battle when once aroused? For my part I have never had any misgivings on the score of N[orthern] courage. When these Pro-Slavery traitors make their boasts, they ought to remember how their B[order] Ruffian hordes were received by the quiet peace loving citizens of Kan., when they tried to plant the curse of slavery in this Territory by foul means, when they could not succeed by fair. Still it will not do to despise the S. soldiery or we will fall into the same error they did before McClellan opened their eyes. You say you wish I could serve with you in your Co in this war. Well, that is a wish I have often expressed myself & so wrote to our F[ather] a short time ago. I know that my pleasure would fully equal yours to have the privilege in giving these Fire eaters their just deserts, but circumstances will oblige us to forgo it for the present at least for should I leave home my Aunt [Eliza] & her children would be left almost without protection from hostile Indians or white Marauders, with which Kan. is well supplied. Our farms would also very
likely go to destruction for want of proper attention. It would seem that I ought to have a stronger incentive than even you to enlist in this war, for while you are only striving to uphold the Union, I should besides that, believe that Slavery would finally be destroyed in case we succeeded. Frank, in your next will you give me your opinion of the right to hold human beings in Slavery whether you think Negroes are better off under the guidance of the superior power and intelligence of the white man, or are they capable of taking care of themselves. Just before I came to Kan. and when I was about your age, there was no class of men I despised or hated more than I did the Abolitionists. I believed them to be a set of hypocritical meddlers and mischief-makers, keeping the nation in an uproar causing hatred between the 2 sections and defeating the object they pretended to have in view by exasperating the Slave holders and consequently causing them to bind more closely the chains of slavery. These ideas were instilled into my mind by my Uncle Cole who was a strong anti-abolitionist although opposed to the future extension of this institution. But after I came to Kan. I examined this subject as much as possible on both sides of the question (The N Y Day Book pro & the N Y. Tribune contra.) and have come to the conclusion that it is based on a stupendous wrong to the African race which cannot be excused by any sophistry on Earth nor by that worn out text from the Bible “Cursed be Canaan” &c. which is so familiar to religious Southerners, and which I once believed to be a knock down argument in favor of Negro Slavery. I am not now ashamed nor afraid to be considered a “Red hot fanatical Abolitionist.” If it would not be too much trouble just give me your views when you write again. The day after I rec’d your letter from Camp Carlisle and after I had answered it—another from you written at home bearing date July 8 came to hand, and a day or 2 after still another dated July 22nd and bearing the post mark of Indianapolis Ind., where it had probably been taken. In the last I found a miniature of yourself which I greatly prize. The Dr. and many others think we strongly resemble each other. I suppose it will not do for me to give you my opinion of your appearance or you might consider me a flatterer. I will only add that 2 T[opeka]. ladies who were visiting my Aunt were examining the picture & I overheard the remarks: “Il est beau. Il est tres joli” &c.

Your uniform looks fine but I do not like the hat. It seems to me that it does not protect the face enough. When you write again please inform me who is the Col of the 2nd Reg. & if you have been
in action, a description of your first feelings &c. when under fire; will be read by us all with the greatest avidity. Your idea of our writing oftener I think a good one; the only draw back with me is I have so little to write that is of interest to you & with even a good subject I make but a poor out of it. Letter writing is not my forte as you can very well see and I am often afraid some of my letters will put you to sleep. I am delighted to hear that our Father is reconciled to your being in the Army. When I received your sudden letter from Carlisle I must say it was one of the proudest moments of my life to think I had a brother so fearless and devoted to the cause of our Country, as to leave home and kindred, to risk his life in the uncertain chances of war, for its preservation. I must close for want of space. My best love & wishes to you. Affectionately yours,

Samuel J. Reader.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[August 28, 1861.]

According to agreement, I again take my pen to address a few lines to you. And would have done so sooner had I possessed anything of interest to write. Your last letter was dated the 29 July & I answered it Aug 8. The other day I received a very pleasant letter from my sisters Martha & Ellen. I intend to answer them kind letters immediately and try to keep up a regular correspondence between us—if agreeable to them—of which I feel no doubt. We are all tolerably well. I have suffered from a cold for a few days. My Aunt had an attack of the bilious fever a month or so ago but has soon recovered. It is believed that we will have an unhealthy Fall as there is such a rank growth of vegetation. The weather however is so dry that we may escape. Every thing is quiet in Kansas I believe at present; There are not so many fears entertained about the Cherokees and some of the wild Indians as formerly. The F[remont]. G[ard]s. meet and drill regularly but have no arms except shot guns, rifles and arms of such description. We have not increased much in numbers since I wrote you last. 2 other members have requested me to strike their names from the roll. We do not expect to go out of the State and of course we will not see any of the fun unless [Gen. Claiborne F.] Jackson or [Gen. Ben.] McCulloch should take a notion to invade us. Then expect to hear of the exploits of the F. G. although I cannot now predict in what we will be most distinguished, fighting or retreating. But remember this: If you hear of Sam. Reader taking to his heels
during action, disown him at once, break off all correspondence, never let it be known that you have a brother. The fear of personal danger is by no means a myth to me, for well I remember the ticklish sensations I experienced when I first heard the hum of bullets from even a distant enemy, but in this war the sacred cause in which we are enlisted ought to be enough to nerve the feeblest arms. The thought that success on our part will almost certainly liberate several millions of despoiled and down trodden people, should give our Abolition friends a courage not inferior to any known on Earth. Last evening I saw a wounded man on his way home from Mo. He was wounded in the head & leg at the great battle of Springfield. A man who lived in Ind. last winter and a young Frenchman, a friend of my B- in law, were killed at the same battle. Col. Mitch-els name is the only one on the list that is known by me. He is badly wounded. I knew him when he was Capt. of Co F T[opeka]a Guards in '56. He was generally liked by his men but was quick tempered and I once saw him have a serious quarrel with Capt. Sam Walker for arresting 2 of his men who had taken two horses of W's men without permission for the sake of taking a ride. Had it not been for the interference of Capt. Whipple (A. D. Stevens, hung at H[arper's]. F[erry]. Va.) blood might have been spilt in their empty quarrel.

A few days ago I sent you a copy of the N. Y. Day Book with a picture suitable for its frontis piece, as I thought. I have read the despicable sheet for several years without receiving any harm or being converted to Slavery & I hear that this evening I have received my last one. I am not so great a friend to the editor as to cry much but at the same time I do not favor suppressing such papers Argument is the thing necessary in such cases. No more

[To His Half-Sister Martha Reader]

[September 3, 1861.]

D[ear]. S[ister]. Had a very pleasant letter from you on the 27 day of last mo. which is the 1st I have rec'd from P. Run since F[rank]. left you for the war I again wrote to our father the 22d of Aug (just a few days before you wrote the 19 came to hand) as I had begun to feel uneasy at his silence. If it would not too much interfere with him and his pressing business I should very much

19. This was the battle of Wilson creek which was fought a few miles south of Springfield, Mo., on August 10, 1861.
20. Col. Robert B. Mitchell of the Second Kansas cavalry was wounded at the battle of Wilson creek. Reader notes in his diary when he ranked the writing in 1891 that the Mitchell was not his "Capt. Mitchell of 1864."
like him to give me his views in regard to this war. I should read them with great interest for not with standing we disagree in many things politically I have remarked that he has predicted this state of things several years ago and blaming the Abol. as much if not more than the Fire-eaters for their prejudice and hatred towards each other.

I have a proposition to make to you and Ellen. It is that you correspond with me regularly which I have no doubt you will agree to as the pleasure it will afford me you can well conceive. Although we have been so far nearly as much strangers to each other as possibly can be still I am determined to not let the barrier of several hundred miles always keep us so. When this war is over F[rank]. has promised me that he will pay me a visit and I will probably return with him and see you all.

I was sorry to hear of your suffering from the tooth ache it must be extremely painful from what I have heard about it. When I was about 11 years old a violent cold settled on several of my double teeth and I then thought I had a considerable time of it but I suppose it was nothing at all in comparison to the regular toothache. You ask me how my foot gets along; well it did not trouble me much. The ax cut off the tendon of my big toe and a small artery, but by keeping the wound together with sticking plaster, and remaining perfectly quiet for 3 or 4 days I was able to go at my usual business in less than a week.

The weather has been pretty dry for a long time. Our corn crop will be heavy; vegetables are doing well. Hay will be plenty and cheap. I never saw the grass look better. I suppose you are aware that our meadows are all out on the prairies, and are generally free to all. The grass on the high ground grows about ½ ft. in height and in low swamps nearly as high as six feet! This latter is very useful in keeping such stock as run out and take care of themselves during the Winter because we never have snows heavy enough to completely bury it. I have no doubt it sounds strange to hear of horses and cattle “wintering” themselves but such is the fact. Last winter was hard on them on account of the shortness of the grass. One day I saw several Indian ponies scraping the snow away with their fore feet in order to get the grass underneath. I do not tell this as “a fish story.” Another staple production of K[ansas] in this vicinity this year is weeds. This pest seems to spring spontaneously from the ground in places that have been free from it heretofore. It is almost impossible to go through the woods now on account of a rough leafed weed which grows 10 or 15 feet in height.
and as thick as a wheat field, (almost). Ind[ianola]. is also to a
great extent shut out from view by weeds of various kinds. The
most prominent among them is the wild sunflower, giving the town
at this time a rather golden appearance. Next to them ranks a
fetid dark green weed with a thorny bur which I believe is called
gympson, and the rank & file is made up of cockleburs, hazel bushes
and sand burs. Perhaps these weeds are gathering around to hide
the secession inhabitants from view. This may give you an idea how
a “1 horse town” in the far West, looks.

[September 5.]

Eliza [Campdoras] calls her little girl Joanna Catherine. She
wishes to write to you and F[rank] also, but has not done so yet as
so much of her time is taken up in her household duties and in
taking care of her children who are the greatest mischiefs in the
Township. You wished us to send you our likenesses. Well as our
daguerreotypist is out of materials necessary for taking pictures, I
took it upon myself to sketch the profile of the Dr. [Campdoras]
while he was talking to my Aunt last Sund. and finished it from
memory. Is in his Naval uniform which he wore while serving as
surgeon in the French. Navy. It is quite correct excepting the
color of the coat which is a shade or two darker. The face will I
think give you a tolerable idea how Dr. Camp[dora]s looks only
remember I never flatter when I attempt to draw a persons likeness.
To aid a little I will jot down a few items concerning his personal
appearance. He is about 5 ft 10 in. in height; and inclined to corpus-
culency; weighs about 180 or 185 lbs. A large head with a heavy
covering of black hair and a luxuriant beard of the same color. He
has black or very dark brown eyes, piercing but with a mirthful
expression ordinarily. His hands and feet are small for a man of
his size. Well I have done my best you see on this subject with pen
& pencil but still have my doubts whether you would know your
brother in law should you meet him an ordinary stranger. It is get-
ding dark. Must close. Write soon.

S. J. R.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[September 13, 1861.]

His Satanic Majesty ought to be the patron of Ind[ianola]. I
was going to say but will wait until I know whether he can stand
their strychnined liquors or not. The most prominent features of
our town now, are weeds, whisky and traitors— Read opinion of
Slavery with much interest—differ on some minor points but agree
on the main question &c &c.
[To His Half-Brother Frank]  
[October 14, 1861.]

An a/c of prairie fires wind &c 2d: about our new Company “your humble servant was elected Ord. Se’gt probably on a/c of his six feet two.” 3, About the 2d reg Jim Lane on plundering “The cause is too holy either considered as a war in support of our Union or as a war for the emancipation of the African race in our midst—to allow a base desire for plunder to occupy the soldiers thoughts.” 4 My opinion of the war Think slavery ought to be put an end to. Uphold Fremont’s acts 21 &c. &c.

[To His Half-Sister Martha]  
[October 21, 1861.]

D[ear] S[ister] Martha:
I rec’d a very welcome letter from you and Ella on the 15 of this mo. containing the tidings of your good health and general prosperity. A few days previous I rec. a letter from Frank which I answered immediately as it was the 2 one I had rec. since writing to him I truly feel proud of him in his present position; and regret I cannot with him lend a helping hand to aid our Gov in putting down this wicked rebellion. Several weeks ago 14 or 15 of our neighbors, mostly members of our Independent Co. enlisted in the Home Guards; 22 but I did not go with them although strongly urged to do so. It certainly looked bad to see some of them men of families leaving for the war while a great strapping healthy fellow like me stayed at home. But maybe I will yet have a chance to show myself as patriotic as my brother especially if our State should be invaded when every good citizen will be invited to turn out and drive the invaders back. I solace myself with the thought that if I cannot help our cause as a soldier I certainly can as a farmer. So for the present at least I will have to be one of the producing class. The reason I have not enlisted yet is that I have my business in such a situation that should I leave everything would be liable to go to destruction, and my Aunt would also be left without any one to see after her affairs except the Dr. and he is of but little account in the farming line. These are my principal reasons which I hope you will accept and not think I am kept from the field through cowardice, if

21. Frémont as commander of the Western department issued a proclamation on August 31, 1861, freeing the slaves of all Southern sympathizers in the state of Missouri who took up arms against the United States. Since this was not in conformity with the confiscation act passed by congress, President Lincoln, on September 11, ordered him to modify his order.—Greeley, op. cit., v. I, p. 585; v. II, pp. 239-240.

I am naturally adapted for running notwithstanding. We are all in tolerable health excepting the Drs children. They both had the chills a few days ago and have not got rid of them yet. Little Leon was the worst. He is my favorite and seems to think a considerable of his "unk Ham," (Uncle Sam) as he calls me. He has now arrived at the period when children are the most interesting and prattles continually. His father is teaching him the French language at which he is quite a proficient already and often salutes me in Fr. I tried to draw his likeness a short time ago but he was like the darkeys pig than ran about so he couldn't be counted. In short he would not be still a moment; therefore I will have to defer drawing his portrait until he gets old enough to comprehend what I want or else screw his head in a carpenters vise. Of course he would be still then but his phiz. would not present a very pleasing appearance; for he possesses a temper that would do honor to his Frankish ancestors of the olden time. In personal appearance he strongly resembles his father; a regular Dr. C. in miniature minus beard and moustaches.

Dade as they call the little girl is prettier featured than Leon and promises to be a fine girl. But I believe I will drop the subject for the present and if I have tired you with it you must remember that it is natural for old bachelors to dote upon their nephews and nieces.

Our Indianola folks of the Secesh stripe are quite quiet now partly owing perhaps to a serenade at which I assisted a few evenings ago. As music is said to soothe the most savage mind. The way it happened I was in town the other evening to put my last letter to Frank in the P. O. where I found Sergt. Rose of the H[ome]. G[uard]s returned on a recruiting tour and another young man who is a fine flutist Mr. Rose got his fiddle and the other man his flute. I returned home (half a mile) and got my flute also on which I can perform a little and we visited every house (groggins excepted) with the exception of a crabbed Dutchman and a bachelor shoemaker whom we concluded could do with out our melody. At the houses of noted Secessionists we played Y. D. [Yankee Doodle?] H. C. [Hail Columbia?] and other patriotic airs & at Unionists such airs as Old Folks at Home, Jordan &c. The worst feature of our evenings entertainment was that at several of the houses we were invited in and liquor denominated "Tangle foot," chain-lightning, Bust-head &c, were set before us. The consequence was that friends Rose and Thompson were complaining of headache the next day; on account of liberal potations imbibed in the evening of the poisonous stuff, which one
of them said was composed of strychnine and cayenne pepper. As I belong to the Temperance Society and rigidly uphold and practice total abstinence I of course suffered no ill effects. In our rounds we went to the Drs house who lives several hundred yards E[ast] of our house and commenced playing under his window. He got up about half awake and as this was the first serenading in this part of the country he concluded we were rowdies come to disturb him. He opened the door and asked if we were drunken people before he perceived his error. Our violinist then sang the Red W. & Blue. I am happy to hear of your opinion of our B-in-law's picture. I will send you my daguerreotype as soon as I can get one. I tried to draw myself before a looking glass and succeeded in producing a hideous looking picture which homely as I am I repudiated. I will try and send you specimens of my scratchings frequently. As a beginning I send you a likeness of one of the noblest and most self-sacrificing heroes of this or any other age when we view him from his own standpoint. I saw and conversed with the old man during our troubles in 1856. And feel prouder of the event than I would of the intimacy of the greatest potentate in the world. He passed life in a humble sphere but if justice be done his generous nature his name will shine while those of the men who sat in judgment over him will sink to oblivion. I expect you will all call this extravagant language. Now girls this picture is for the one that will prize it highest in plain terms the strongest Abolitionist. D. Sisters write often as nothing is more welcome to me than your kind letters. My next letter I will write to Ella and so on alternately. I have no more space. Your affectionate brother,

Samuel J. Reader.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[December 1, 1861.]

About writing Health Weather &c. Our local news is unimportant. Kansas is not one of the Battle fields yet although many families are leaving S[outhern] K[ansas] on account of the lawless condition of things in that section. Last Sund I assisted at the funeral of the child of one of the refugees & he informed me that bands of Mo. miscreants were almost continually making inroads into K. in his neighborhood plundering the defenceless inhabitants and in many instances shooting the Union men down like dogs. He said these ruffians were incited to these deeds to retaliate the plun-

dering of Seeshers by some of the K-guerrilla parties who were stealing "on their own hook." Such trials and dangers are very disheartening to settlers in that locality. Here we feel comparatively safe in this respect for this winter at least. This driving off and murdering of innocent inhabitants is certainly one of the most dreadful concomitants of war. From the [Leavenworth] daily papers we learn that Weston only 10 m. from that city is in the hands of the Traitors; and that several officers have been arrested by them. Nothing has pleased me more of late than Sec. Camerons endorsement of Col. Cochrane's speech, which you of course, have read long ere this. Still I would have been better pleased had this policy been inaugurated last Spring; or better still had Slavery been abolished by U. Sam as soon as showed a determined disposition to resist his authority. Still it is not for me to criticise I suppose. I declare, Frank I have nothing to write to you that I think will interest you. Were I in Camp as you are I might make my letters less barren. Write soon &c &c &c.

Samuel J. Reader.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[January 5, 1862.]

Rec. &c &c Gave an interesting a/c of battle on Alleghany Mts. Gen. Price retreating. Delighted that Jim Lane is to command Kan troops. The men all have confidence in him and he knows how to carry on the war amongst our B-R neighbors of Mo. and in him the Contrabands find a true friend and liberator. Health good Drs to Ill. Well we presume Eliza you know like myself is not very punctual in writing some times A snow &c. I am no friend of cold weather. It uses me up completely, and I have been frost-bitten slightly several times. Some think it is because I do not warm my blood up with alcohol; but I am of the opinion that the remedy is worse than the inconvenience. Hot weather makes but little impression on me and should I ever leave this place it will be to make another move towards the sunny south. Our little town is as quiet as you please &c &c. One of the number W. E. T. married a Half

24. The Kansas State Journal, Lawrence, December 5, 1861, gives the following account: "Last Thursday St Gorden, with his clan, took possession of Weston, Mo., only a few miles from Leavenworth. On the afternoon of that day upon the arrival of the train from St. Joe the rebel band surrounded it and took Captains Moonlight and Rabe, who were passengers, prisoners. . . ."


26. "Yes, Jim Lane was as good (or as bad,) as 'our Border-ruffian neighbors of Mo.' when he got over there with fire & sword." —Note added by Reader to his diary when retelling it in 1911.
breed squaw on N. Years and the whole town, nearly, has been on a bust ever since. He is a brother of the proprietor of our billiard saloon; was in the P[ro]. S[avery] army in 56-7. Murdered a man at Lecompton; was convicted and pardoned out by Gov. Robinson. He struts about as impudent as Lucifer, with the back of his head 3 in. in rear of his heels. No more.

Signed Sam. Reader.

[To His Half-Sister Martha]

January 15, 1862.

Reception of letters. Health of all Drs &c. Weather. Prices. Corn 10 Pork 2 1/2. Beef 3 cts. No fears of famine. No news in Kan. Legislature met. It seemed to me that good luck had all come at once for with it came one from F. which I of course opened first to see if he had been in the late battle. I was much delighted to hear of his good health & spirits. He is certainly a great writer for one so young from the number of letters he has written to you since being a soldier besides his correspondence to myself, and doubtless many others. I should very much like to see some of his newspaper communications. I am certain from the letters he has written to me that he is fully competent as a War Correspondent. We cannot doubt that he will attain celebrity as he comes to maturer years should he feel so disposed. You say you want my "Shadow" in uniform as a Christmas gift. I faithfully promise to send it just as soon as I can get an opportunity to have it taken; not in uniform however, as our Co. has not procured uniforms yet and perhaps will not for some time, if ever. We have not met to drill for some time on a/c of the cool weather and the tranquil appearance of the State. If I could draw a likeness of myself which would be in any wise accurate, I would do it with pleasure but I believe it would be in vain. I have made and sent to Our relatives of La Harpe so many pictures of myself in caricature especially during the Kansas War, that I can hardly represent myself in any other than a ludicrous character and one of that description you might not think in very good taste. Besides, I intend to be a little more careful in the future how I send such sketches to my friends; as I have placed myself in an unpleasant predicament by it already. It was in this manner: After the Dr. and Eliza were married I sketched a comic tableau of the wedding. I represented them on the floor looking as if their last day had come while I stood near in the shape of the section of a rainbow shedding tears of regret. My Uncle & Aunt were made in
about equally ridiculous attitudes. Now this picture I sent to my U. Samuel [James] to give him an idea of the appearance of the marriage as I said, without the faintest supposition that the Dr. would ever see it. But in this I was mistaken for it was preserved and in his letter the Dr congratulated me on my success in drawing &c. informing me that my cousin Miss America James recognizes him at first sight from the resemblance he bore to his likeness in the wedding scene. I know there is too much mirth in his character for him to be offended, but still I feel quite cheap when I think of this picture being exhibited to him. It would indeed be a pleasure to meet you all soon and if it is not possible now I do not intend that our separation shall be eternal. Ella speaks of your instrumental music May I ask what instrument you are learning to play upon. I am very fond of music instrumental in particular and sometimes try to make some myself in my own poor way upon the flute, but without much success. I purchased my instrument just before we came to Kan. and commenced tooting upon it but contrary to the advice of sister E. refused to learn the notes thinking it too much trouble. She understands music thoroughly and tried to get me to take lessons from her but the first lesson appeared so formidable to me that I gave it up. I continued in blissful ignorance until about or more than a year ago when finding I was making no progress of any account—I took up the "Carmina Sacra" and by dint of hard studying on Sundays (not being a member of Church,) and odd times, I mastered what I had supposed so difficult in a short time. There is one tune that I have never come across, "The Star Spangled banner" If you have the air, will not one of you as a great favor to me, copy the music and send it to me? You write also that you are in a class of vocalists. Well that is something I know as little of as I do of Latin & Greek. I never sing and do not suppose I could go through correctly with any tune to save my life. I feel very much flattered at receiving Ellas compliments about John B[rown]'s picture and may I not say gratified to hear her expressions of noble, and martyred, in connection with his name. I will try and send specimens of my "daubing" as often as I can execute any thing that will be worthy of notice "Artist" you cannot properly call me for I have never received instruction in drawing or painting from master or book in my life, and draw pictures (generally comic) for amusement. No more space

S. J. R.
[To His Uncle Samuel James]

[January 18, 1862.]

I wrote 3 pages to S about La Harpe soldiers their wounds &c. My views of the war. Don't like old Abe's giving emancipation the cold shoulder. I am the same as any other radical dyed in the wool abolitionist. We are all well "Whet ther air of us" and there are enough of us too this cold weather. Sent word to Dr. & E all safe &c. About Burnett getting stove. Tax on land &c.

Signed "Uncle Sam to Uncle Sam."

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[January 19, 1862.]

Dear [brother].

Day before yesterday I received a letter from you dated Jan. 3 in which you said you had not received any word from me since you wrote last. I wrote to you the first part of this mo. in answer to yours of Dec. and I suppose it has reached you before this

We are all enjoying excellent health. The Dr [Campdoras] & family are all right at last accounts. The little boy had an attack of the croup but soon got over it. We do not expect them home before Spring. I sent in your complaint as well as our Sisters to E. for not writing to you, yesterday. Our weather has been cold and disagreeable for some weeks. A snow of six in. is still lying on the ground. Prices for farm produce are low while Cotton and woolen goods are high. Salt sells for 5¢ pr. lb.

You ask how my military pulse beats. Well I hope its pulsations are still true to the Union but its throbs would rise to fever heat were we also fighting against this unholy system of Slavery which our enemies are so carefully fostering even at the expense of disloyalty and a formidable war waged against them. I am no politician and know nothing in regard to the intricate windings of diplomacy as you well know, and therefore ought not to set up my judgment in this matter, still it seems to me that the most ordinary common sense would dictate the overthrow of Slavery. What are your views in this matter? What lamentable folly some of our Gens. show in discountenancing fugitive slaves. Jim Lane knew what course to pursue in Mo. in respect to slaves and no troops were more feared by the enemy than his Brigade. Even you Va. boys from your last letter are beginning to find out the utility of the despised "Contrabands."
I learned last night that Sec. Cameron has been relieved from his position in the Cabinet. I am as sorry to hear of his removal as I was about Fremont, for I had formed a high opinion of their ability and views for prosecuting the war. You gave some amusing anecdotes about the runaway darkies.

I thank Fortune that as soon as one sets foot in Kan. soil he is a free man. What unspeakable joy must be awakened in these poor creatures minds when they for the first time realize that they are free; when they know that they will no longer have to toil from “sun to sun,” under the drivers lash and no longer dread the (to them) dreadful thought of being sold “down south” unless they tamely submit to their fate. I was in {Opeki}a the other day and saw quite a number of negroes employed by the citizens. They looked intelligent and happy. I believe they have 15 or 20 there but none have come over on this side of the river yet that is, in this Township. Excuse my dwelling on this subject so long. Remember, I know no better than to think Negroes better off free than slave, and am a confirmed dyed in-the-wool abolitionist. I am happy to hear that U. S. A. provides you all with such good fare. Some of my acquaintances of the Kan. 2d tell me that last Summer while in Mo. they were often on half rations and some times had nothing but fresh meat. They gallantly fought at the battle of Springfield without any other uniform than a blue blouse and many were not well supplied with canteens and suffered dreadfully for want of water. You asked me how I spent the holidays. Well I am afraid I did not observe them very properly. First Christmas was so fine a day for work that I broke that day entirely. N. Y. s day I find by looking at my Journal was cold and I kept in doors mostly, although invited to be present at the wedding of Wm. T. one of our rankest Pro Slaverites to be married to a Half breed Pott[awatomie] squaw 10 mi. from here. More than half the town was there. I was in town when the crowd started. Almost every one had a bottle or two of Red eye on board and several good swigs under their belts to keep the cold off. In the evening I took my cousin F[rances], to a kind of social party, ostensibly a “Candy pulling,” but on arriving, found it to be more of a play party than anything else. We could not complain of girls for they outnumbered the gents more than two to one. Our host being a strictly religious man nothing like dancing was attempted and it made no difference with me for I never shook the fantastic toe more than 10 or 15 times in my life and as old age is creeping on me like the galloping consumption after a fast young
lady that I probably never will shake it again. Our Master of Ceremonies was Mr Bowker or rather Capt. B. of our Independent Co. You see we civilians have every thing our own way now but when the “Bowld Soger boys” come home our day will be over; then will “the greater glory dim the less” and we will all sink into insignificance.

Our local news has not been important for a long time. The State Legis. met a few days ago at T[opeka] but I believe are doing nothing important. Day before yesterday the S. Court decided that Chas R[obinson], our old Dem. half traitor Gov. can remain in office another year, and thus leave Mr Crawford who received a heavy vote last Fall, out in the cold.27

I answered Mats [Martha’s] last letter a week or so ago. Can it be possible that Ella is becoming an abolitionist? Her letters seem to show it. In your next please tell me if you are camped out in tents yet or are you in barracks? I will close.

S. J. R.

[To His Half-Brother Frank]

[February 19, 1862.]

Health & Weather—Snow lying on ground— “Not following up” my business as closely &c— Temperature—I suppose your present elevation has the effect of keeping your Reg[iment]. cool which you know is a very desirable quality in a soldier. You soldier[s] must suffer many hardships this cold weather especially while standing guard at night but I believe you informed me in one of your letters that you were exempt from this duty. In your next I wish you would inform me about the general health of the army in your vicinity. I have lately heard that there is much sickness among the soldiers on the Potomac but it may be that your mountainous situation has a salutary effect in warding off disease. I am happy to hear that you will probably be your Majors Secy. It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword and I know that you can wield the former with success and ease, if I may be permitted to judge from what I have seen and the number of letters your sister[s] say you have written to them since you have been in camp To me it would be almost a Herculean task that is if I were obliged to think up subjects enough to make my letters interesting. Everything is quiet in our little town. No new visits from the Jayhawkers In fact I

27. At an election held November 5, 1861, state officers were voted on, George A. Crawford being the candidate for governor. The state board refused to canvass his votes, holding that the terms of the officials then serving did not begin until Kansas was admitted as a state, notwithstanding they were elected in 1856. A writ of mandamus to compel the board to canvass the votes was denied by the supreme court which declared that the election was illegal.—Wilder, op. cit., November 5, 1861, January 9 and 21, 1862.
believe Jay hawking as it is called and which is identical with pressing in 56 & 57 has been discouraged and punished until it hardly dares show its head. I always condemned such proceedings on the U[nion] side although many of our deluded neighbors thought it a pious institution. The men engaged in it must have been devoid of principle. If I were to go into the war, it would be to fight and not to learn to be a thief and the only property I should think of touching would be the lawful booty taken in the enemy’s camp and perhaps if a chance should occur taking off certain biped property from the owners (?) which (“Oh the depravity of the human heart?”) I should consider a very praiseworthy action. I am sure no twinges of conscience would trouble me nor do I think my sleep would be disturbed by the goblin spectre of some plantation lord with the bible under one arm and the Constitution of the U. S. under the other. Our Kan news is not important. Jim Lane and the people of our state are disappointed that old Jim has not the command of an expedition which is to start Southward as soon as Spring opens. We must all of necessity however submit to the powers that be at Washington. I was pleased with your plain and candid statement on the subject of emancipation, but sorry to think that you for a moment should think me of a disposition to be offended at it. Plain speaking when not carried to excess for the love of contradiction we all know is a desirable characteristic and I flatter myself that I appreciate it in common with others. Our views in regard to this matter are at variance more than I supposed. I see you view our present struggle in the same light that a great majority of the American people N[orth] do; viz: the maintenance of the Union and destruction to the traitors who dare to pull the glorious fabric down. Now these are very fine sentiments. Our Country is the most democratic and free than any other in the civilized world, and I am proud and happy to think I am an A[merica]n. citizen and should be miserable if I thought our Rep. form of Gov. should be destroyed were we to be foiled in our attempt to subdue the S. without freeing her slaves. But this I do not believe would happen. We of the N. are certainly men enough to know how to get along without being guided and governed by the vile and despotic Southerners, and if it is the policy of the Gov. to shoot and stab them back into the U[nion]. and still let them foster and extend their abominable in-

28. This refers to the proposed military expedition to the Southwest. (See Footnote 25.) Lane was not placed in command of the forces but was ordered to report to Gen. D. Hunter, the commanding officer. Since he could not lead the expedition, Lane announced that he would again take up his duties in the Senate.—Stephenson, loc. cit., pp. 118-122.
stitution, my sympathies for the success of the war will cease, for is it not self evident that Slavery is the cause of the war and would it not expose us to perpetual wars and commotion hereafter and would not the separation they are so anxious for, be preferable to such a state of things? I suppose at the beginning of the war that every effort would be made to weaken the Rebels by encouraging their slaves to desert or still better to come out open and above board and emancipate them, thereby gaining the sympathies of Europe instead of their enmity as we have nearly done already; and showing our own people that a settled policy had been inaugurated. As you say, hundreds or thousands of soldiers (of the Border Slave states we presume) would desert \textit{preferring} Slavery for the Un., but could not their places be supplied by the free negroes of the N and the runaways of the S? These are my sentiment[s].\textsuperscript{29} I see Frank that your “heart is in the right place”; that is, you wish to see Slavery destroyed but not by an act of the general Gov’t. and think the subject ought not to be agitated too much for fear of damaging our cause and that slavery will be destroyed or abolished in some manner not explained. It is very possible that you are right and I am wrong but it seems to me that agitation will do no harm in this crisis. Now is the time to strike while the Slaveryites are ripe for destruction. I have here plainly stated my ideas as you did yours so you can now know exactly how I stand, but I want you to understand, if I am an abolitionist I am not an amalgamationist, but want the blacks colonized by themselves, which will be better for them and for us. I have perhaps looked on the dark side of the picture and may be agreeably disappointed when the storm of war bursts forth in the Spring to see the Northerners banners with \textit{“Emancipation,”} inscribed alongside of our glorious motto: \textit{“Union.”} I should like to say more about this matter but space will not permit, and perhaps your patience will be sufficiently tried with this. It is not necessary for me to request you to write soon, as you are always punctual.

Your very affectionate brother,

Samuel J. Reader.

\textsuperscript{29} Reader made the following marginal note in 1871: “How lucky it was that Sam Reader did not manage the Civil War in 1862. ‘The pear was not ripe,’ and Abolitionists had to ‘wait a spell.’”

\textit{(To be concluded in the May Quarterly)}