The Letters of Joseph H. Trego, 1857-1864, Linn County Pioneer
Edited by Edgar Langsdorf
Part One, 1857, 1858

Introduction

In the autumn of 1857 Dr. Joseph Harrington Trego left his home in Mercer county, Illinois, for a new residence in Linn county, Kansas. Because the southeastern part of Kansas territory was rough and unsettled, he left his wife and three little girls in Illinois until he could prepare a home for them in the new country. Earlier in the year he had selected a location at Sugar Mound, now Mound City, and had completed arrangements with Thomas Ellwood Smith and his brother, Edwin Smith—the Ell and Ed mentioned in the letters—to erect and operate a sawmill on Little Sugar Creek.

The townsite had been located in 1855 by David W. Cannon and Ebenezer Barnes, and was known as Sugar Mound because of its proximity to a mound of that name which lay a little to the east. An act of the territorial legislature of 1858 incorporating the Mound City Town Company was approved February 2, 1858, and thereafter the town was called Mound City. Trego and the two Smiths were among the prominent men of the settlement. When the town company was first organized, in 1857, Trego became secretary and T. E. Smith was a trustee. Their mill was one of the important industries of the community. Commencing operations near the end of December, 1857, it produced the lumber and shingles for the first frame buildings in Mound City. A store and post office belonging to Charles Barnes, the first president of the town company, was completed on January 30, 1858, and the first three frame houses, property of the sawmill proprietors, were finished in April and June.

Trego was born at Pineville, Bucks county, Pa., on May 8, 1823, one of eleven children of Jacob and Letitia Trego. Although there

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are some discrepancies in the accounts of his early life, it is known that he lived in Pennsylvania probably until 1843, when he moved to Illinois with other members of the family. They settled in Mercer county, where Trego farmed for three years before he went East to enter the medical school of Jefferson College in Philadelphia. After graduating in March, 1849, he returned to Illinois to practice medicine at WIlloby, near the town of Preemption. He was married on August 22, 1850, to Alice Mannington, whom he had met in 1849 when she was visiting an aunt in Mercer county.

Although he was a practicing physician in Illinois, Trego never attempted to establish himself in his profession after coming to Kansas. His letters indicate that he was dissatisfied with a profession that, in those days, involved so much inconvenience and left him little leisure time to spend with his family. At any rate, he was a doctor only by title in Mound City.¹

The following letters were written by Trego to his wife during the fall and winter of 1857-1858 while she was in Illinois and he in Kansas. They are part of a group of family letters which were presented to the Historical Society in February, 1949, by Dr. Trego's daughter, the late Mrs. Sara Trego Morse of Mound City. In preparing the letters for publication, passages containing only personal or family reference, and those lacking general interest, have been omitted.

THE LETTERS OF 1857, 1858

ST LOUIS SEPT 10TH/57

We are yet in St Louis as you see but we start from here some time tomorrow. This is now sunday night, and I write you from, or in, one of the heavenward rooms in Barnum's hotel. It is a very rainy night and we are very well content to stay indoors having had plenty of exercise, anxiety and hot weather to endure since our arrival. . . . The boat we came down on from the foot of the rapids, should have made her regular trip down to-day but was disabled in a storm which we encountered directly we left Keokuk. It blew so hard that the hurricane deck was loose in many places and the roof over the Ladies cabin was partly blown overboard exposing the fine furniture to the beating rain as long

¹ Sources of information concerning Trego are: A. T. Andreas and W. G. Cutler, History of the State of Kansas (Chicago, 1888), pp. 1108, 1110; A. Trego Shertzer, A Historical Account of the Trego Family (Baltimore, 1884), pp. 40, 47, 81, 82; Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, August 28, 1900; Mound City Torch of Liberty, July 20, 1905; Mound City Border Sentinel, 1864-1874; letter from Theodore W. Morse to Edgar Langsdorf, Mound City, August 27, 1906.
as the shower lasted. The ladies were not exposed to it so long, as they proceeded toward the bow of the boat at a quicker step than would be considered dignified enough under ordinary circumstances.

The Missouri river is low & we expect a rather tedious trip to Kansas City, but we will take along a supply of novels & peaches so it wont be so bad

You must write me at

Sugar Mound P. O.
Linn Co
K. T.

very soon. Tell me all about the affairs at home &c. . . .

With much love to you

J H Trego

Monday 4 O'clock—

Boat starts soon. We have been as busy as possible so far to day closing up our business & moving to boat. Have just received my medicine, chest. The boat got aground and was delayed untill the next [line [?] boat came along to-day & pulled her off yesterday & to-day's boat coming in together. A store house is on fire nearby which bids fair to be a big one yet. There was another exciting occurrence on board our boat. While we were at dinner a trunk was broken open in a room adjoining ours and several thousand dollars taken out. Family that is moving west—all they have in way of money—

J H Trego


Dear Alice

Have been going to write all day but couldn't get at it untill about the last chance that I can have on board this boat, & after we leave the boat it is probable we will find no more time or opportunity for letter writing untill we reach our destination, so I thot I would write you from this place, thinking it might be agreeable to have intelligence of our progress before we get entirely thro' with our journey. We have made slow progress, very, in consequence of low water, and a boat so heavily laden that it has been difficult to keep her floating in daylight; having to tie up of nights.

Many a stick we have had on the sand bars & many a snag has made the boat quiver & bound till I have been seriously concerned
about her safety, because if she had sprung a leak we would have been put the trouble and perhaps loss of getting our baggage off and obtaining passage on another craft. But we are within three hours of our stopping place & I have no doubt now but that we will be on land by sunset. The boat shakes so that I cannot write without making a rather old looking hand of it. There has been nothing of particular interest since we left St Louis. . . .

No more at present so good bye love until we get to Sugar Mound. With love to all I am

Yours always
Jo

IN OUR LOG-CABIN AT SUGAR MOUND OCT 16TH/37

MY DEAR WIFE

I did not think I would have deferred writing you so long as this. It has been three weeks, and a few days over perhaps, since I wrote you from Kansas City,—the day of our departure from that place. . . .

We hired a teamster in Kansas C. to bring us and our luggage down to the Mound. We expected to stop, on the way, at public houses, as the road is an old military road leading to Fort Scott, consequently we made no preparation much for camping out; but in this we were disappointed, for the driver would stop every night on the open prairie so his mules could feed close to the wagon and our only chance for eating was to lay in a heavy dinner when ever we came to a cabin where we could get some,—there being no regular places for accommodating travellers on the route,—and go to bed—on the ground—without any supper. We had some coffee, mornings, & a few crackers would do us very well until about noon of each day that we were on the way, when we either stopped at a cabin while the driver would go on to a feeding place or, if he was at a good pasture about noon and no cabin near we would go ahead and order a dinner which was always the same, fat pork, corn-bread, fried butter and coffee, followed with peach pie without sweetening. We saw several farms where they had a great abundance of peaches. The road out from the river is on the state line and for nearly a days journey it is fenced all up on one side with old and well improved farms as far east as we could see, while to the right—in the territory, owned by Indians some of it—it is open, wild prairie.

When we arrived at home we found the family yet in the house, but they began at once to pick up there plunder and move it into
the still smaller cabin that was first put up here to make the claim. It is not fit to live in only in good weather. They have since erected a new cabin on their claim, which we helped them lay up and which they are now living in. They are very clever folks and as pleasant as they can be, but they are of the "Hoosier" stripe and of course not company for us. They came from Missouri opposite the Ohio and are proslavery, but the subject has not [been] mentioned between us yet; we have it from free-state neighbors, and [from] seeing a slave to work for one of the family who lives on another claim. The brother of whom we bot this place has lived here longer, was present last summer during the war and this fall voted the free state ticket.

We boarded for a week or two after our arrival, as our provisions had not yet arrived from St Louis when we left Kansas, tho', as soon as we could get rested and Mr. Chidester had time to see around and conclude to take an interest in the town, he and I started, with a driver, back to Kansas [City], he to return home and I to buy a stove and other fixings to keep house with. It was the hardest job I ever had. In consequence of a rainy spell which came on after we started home with the load we were much longer on the road, and then the nights, oh dismal! We were wet all the time day & night and my boots were so tight on my feet after the first day’s walk in the mud that I was afraid to pull them off lest I couldn’t get them on again. On a Sunday night, Oct 4th we were over taken by night on a prairie and as hard a rain as I ever saw about, the wind, too, blew hard all night which drove the wet thro the muslin cover of the wagon till the driver was nearly drowned. I fared better because I had the large buffalo robe around me with the hair side out which kept me from getting any wetter than I was by walking in the rain thro the day, which we were obliged to do all the time on account of the deep mud. There were two teams in company and the drivers had to each one hire teams to finish up their journey, there own teams being completely done for, soon after crossing the Marias des Cygnes, only about fifteen miles from home. Since that time we have had good weather, and warm, untill yesterday, which was a cold blustering day and this morning we had enough frost to nip pumpkin vines &c.

We have our things arranged for living now & have been getting things ready to go on with the work. We made headsteds by putting together some poles and swinging the fabric from the joice by means of ropes. This was to get our roost where the inhabitants
cant bore us with their company, and there are several large families hanging 'round. Some day when I have time I think I will take a sketch of the interior and send it along and, also, of the travellers and thier rigg as they appeared the day the teams gave out. We were out hunting one day since we have been here—often go into the wood to shoot squirrils—and brot home a turkey. I prepared it for cooking, and all right too, but the stuffing, which we couldn't come, for want of bread. It went very well and lasted us several days, but—but I guess I wont eat any more turkey this winter. We gathered some hops and if we had a little yeast to start with I think I could make bread. Will get some when we go up to Kansas [City] again after the Mill. When at Kansas [City] I bot a small wash tub & a washboard, and two flat irons, so we could do some of our washing. We tried it one day and done up a pile of socks, and some towels, the shirts we concluded to leave awhile; since that we employed a neat kind of woman to do our washing for the winter. I think tho' we will continue to wash towels & socks as we have to pay 10 cts a piece . . .

Sugar Mound, December 5th 1857

My Dear Wife

It is morning, four O'clock, and I have swept up a place before the fire and swept the ashes and litter all into the fire so that it looks kind of comfortable around and before me. As to the appearance of things back in the interior of the cabin I have nothing to say. I am writing with a board in my lap that serves as a desk. We have a table but I can't sit by that and be close to the fire. . . .

We have had such bad weather ever since our arrival here that it has been quite discouraging. So much rain that we could not keep our work going along to advantage and about two weeks ago we had a real cold snap. The murcury getting down to 10° one morning that was an extreme, but many days it was 18 and 20° scarcely thawing all day. All this week the weather has been good enough, mostly warm, sunny days and some nights not cold enough to freeze any. Have had no snow to lay on the ground more than a few hours and all the stock is yet doing well on the low prairies there being plenty of grass that is some green yet. I say all the stock because I don't know of one stable in the country and the animals are necessarily exposed to the weather just as it comes along.

Ell starts this morning for Kansas City & if the boats are yet running, will go on to St Louis to bring up some machinery, the
chief of which is a corn mill which bids fair to be a very profitable investment as flour here is worth six dollars per hundred. We bought a lot when the machinery was brot down which we sold at five & quarter. There is a small affair for grinding corn, a few miles from here which has been doing as such mills generally do in a new country, taking enormous toll and selling meal high. They manage to get one third for toll and sell the meal at one dollar per bushel. So the people are bound that we shall bring on a corn mill as we talked of doing. I find that I will have to close soon for there is so much stir and getting ready to start to the mill,—we have breakfast so as to get the hands off to work before sunrise having two miles to go,—and I want Ell to carry this to St Louis with him so you can get it direct. I will write again soon when I have more time and nobody to interrupt.

I am as ever your affect husband

Sugar Mound Dec 11th 1857

Dear Little Wife

... Ell came back ... this evening; was not able to get to St Louis, or, at least, there was no prospect of getting back again, with freight and the fare down is enormous. The river is clear of ice but boatmen are afraid there might be some made suddenly.

Since last Saturday, the weather has been warm enough, some of the time rainy like, tho' not to stop work. Yesterday and to-day the sun shone very fine and warm, the mercury getting up from 36° this morning to 64° at noon; after noon it was much higher, but the sun could shine on the thermometer. The Indians, and all the old trappers and traders, agree in the opinion that we will have but little freezing this winter, if so, it will be nice enough for the grass is not all killed by the frost yet and animals continue to feed pretty well on it.

During this last week, Ed and I have been down to the mill untill late of evenings, when we would come home tired and have a fire to make up and supper to get, which is often some bread and molasses— we get some bread baked in at the next door— and the same old tune “what fools we were to come out here to live this way” with various accompaniments, such as ‘how nice it would be to have a clean room to sit down in,’ or ‘wouldn’t I like to have the children to talk to awhile,’ or ‘T’d give a pile of money if my wife was here instead of ten thousand miles off,’ and a great many other preposterous exclamations, but we can’t help it. Time does hang
heavily and we dont expect it to do otherwise untill we can see our families again.

There is to be a meeting to-day of the town company. We have not selected our locations in the city yet. We have been waiting for this meeting and I suppose we will make our selections soon and have the cellars dug for the houses. I hope to get a lot in among some trees near the mill and where we can see the creek from the windows and the falls too when the leaves are off which, in high water, is very fine. At present it is not much for the streams are only just a little affected by the rains which we have had. We are having a moveing today, but it is only a large log-crib to sleep in of nights when we don't all want to walk home, which, with me would often be the case.

We bought provisions in St Louis, on our way out intending to board our hands. We tried it but found it no go, and our own living now costs Ed and myself as much as it would to keep our families. Oh the waste and the very extrava[ga]nt use of coffee and sugar and Golden syrup at $1.30 per gal. Ed gets rampant once in a while because, he says, 'what he has he worked for' and I have resolved many times that when I can get out of this "baching it" I will provide only for my own table, and all those who like to eat sugar wet with very strong coffee, and syrup with cake crumbs in it may be at the whole expense of procuring them.

Yesterday I was as busy as possible "clearing up," and salting down some beef. We cant keep meat fresh but a few days. It was so warm yesterday that flies were about the house.

I will mail one of our papers to-day (if I get to the office in time) for Walt that he may see the other side of the free-state party from what is represented in the Tribune. I regard it as a kind of mediator for the Southerners here who are in favor of and have voted to make Kansas a free-state, indirectly, that is, by voting the free-state ticket in October, but they would have their prejudices excited against any movement intended to benefit the niggers. They are in favor of a free state government from politic motives & not humane. Nearly all our neighbors are of that kind and they will probably do anything to resist the efforts of office seekers—as they regard them—from forcing slavery upon us, but to fight. They were all run out of the territory a year ago and running would be thier choice again. It makes some of them look pale to hear of danger of collisions and I've no doubt we would too if we were not so absorbed in business that we have not time to think enough about the matter to appreciate the danger.
A party of armed F[ree] S[tate] men passed by here two days since, on their way to a nest of pro-slavery scoundrels in Bourbon Co but thier business was not made public so we were left to conjecture. The conclusion was that they intend to string up a man who has made himself particularly odious to the people of Lawrence and gone to old Ft. Scott for protection from those who would deal with him as the laws would direct if there was any law capable of directing.

Well, I must go into the woods now and rake up some dry leaves to put into our bed; it has flattened down so that it is to much like laying on a pile of rails with only a quilt over them. Ell's bed is no better at all and he is to tired to fix it any better so I expect he can just have it so as long as he has a mind to. I stop in the cabin this forenoon to help the teamster load the logs while the others are at the mill. After dinner I go down to the mill and if the mail has not passed will mail my letter to-day, otherwise it will not go untill Tuesday, the up mail being on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. . . .

Your devoted Husband

Sugar Mound Dec 21st 1857

My Dear Wife

I shall adhere to the promise of writing every week, as closely as possible. We are exceedingly busy every day except Sundays, when we desist from work as the hands, some of them, and the people generally are Methodists or Baptists.

Of evening I am often so tired that I cannot read more than a few minutes and writing is no go at all. Yesterday week I went out to shoot deer, wounded one and followed it so far that we—Ell was along—did not get back untill noon the next day. What a splendid prairie we saw, high mounds and broad valleys without a tree or house in sight all day, except at starting, and when we were returning home came in sight of timber on Big Sugar. We had set out fires as we went along and a night there was a big fire. We stopped at a cabin, at eight o’clock, for the night. It was warm enough to lie out but the ground was rather moist, without blankets to wrap up in. We were nearly as tired as tho’ we had been at work.

Yesterday too I wanted to be at head-quarters to see and hear. You will have heard when this reaches you, no doubt, of the doings here and, as usual, much will be said that will proceed chiefly from some imaginative brains. I will try to give a little sketch of the matter as nigh the truth as anybody who will write for the papers.
There has been difficulty on the Little Osage all summer & fall between pro-slavery and free-state men, about claims, hogs &c. The free-state men that were driven away a year ago, came back to their claims and found them, in many cases, occupied by Missourians who refused to give them up, and [their] hogs, [and] other stock being clean gone—which were in the timber [were] claimed by these Missourians. In short, there was continual bra[ws?] among them and the pro-slaves being the most numerous in this locality they could enforce the bogus laws and have things pre[tty] much their own way. The free-state men 'wouldn't give it up' and some of them are not the most peaceable kind of fellows either, and the disturbances increased until there was open war between them.

They have a bogus court at Ft. Scott and free-state men were brot before it for defending their rights and in every case beaten and court charges & law[y]ers fees piled on so heavily that they were unable to pay so their property was seized and sold to Missourians at nominal prices, and immediately driven away. I have talked with several who were stripped of every thing they had in that way. Free-state men from different parts went down there to assist them in these difficulties, the party, when all together, numbered fifty. They were attacked by the ruffians. The particulars of the attack, as I heard the 'Boys' tell it over and over again in their camp, was that the ruffians numbered about two hundred mounted men, while the Boys numbered but fifty and but few mounted. The ruffians came upon them and were about to surround them, to take them prisoners it was supposed, so fifteen of the Boys opened a fire upon them with Sharpe's-rifles. The fire was returned but the commander being wounded he set up such a cry of 'I'm shot I'm shot' that the ruffians broke and run to a distance of three fourths of a mile. Considering themselves at a safe distance they halted to take further council probably. So one of the boys got permission to try his skill with his rifle to see what he could effect. He fired and knocked a man off his horse. The man was gathered up as speedily as possible and the party got themselves out of sight before they stopped again. The ruffians had three wounded, but none killed that has been heard of yet. The boys came off unscathed, tho one fellow narrowly escaped having a ball shot thro' his body, the ball having struck his revolver which was under a belt, at his side. The boys then came up to the Mound here to await reinforcements as they knew that a still larger body of ruffians would be collected in the vicinity of the Fort. The intention of the boys is to go down there as soon as they are sufficiently
strong in numbers, and give the ruffians a sound drubbing, such a
one as will make them keep the peace hereafter.

[Addison] Danford and [R. B.] Mitchell, representatives from
this county, came home last night in a great hurry having heard,
while at Lecompton that Sugar Mound was about to be taken. The
ruffians had become alarmed at the storm they had raised and sent
up the most preposterous stories about the burning and pillaging
that was being perpetrated by the Abolitionists, to induce the gov-
ernor to send U. S. troops to their aid. Stanton 2 sent troops, too,
to the fort with orders to protect the land office and other govern-
ment property but not to interfere with the fight, for [he] said "if
they want a fight let them have it out."

Last night some time it commenced snowing. I could feel it
coming thro' the roof into my face, it fell very light however and
was no further inconvenience than the sensation produced, which
was similar to being tormented by flies. To-day it has continued
[to] fall nearly all the time and is yet snowing but the air is so
warm yet that it does not collect any as I can see, it being just about
enough on the ground to make good tracking of deer and turkeys.
We have not had the ground frozen for three weeks and many days
the mercury has been up to 64° or there about.

Wednesday evening 23rd . . . We moved to the mill yester-
day. You may remember perhaps that our cabin in the woods is
two miles from the creek, we sometimes had to walk it, frequently
of late, and we got tired of the fun so we moved a corn crib down
here and put our things into it, that is all that we could. It is a
fact and no joke and we find it quite comfortable. It is 12 ft long
and 9 ft wide; no floor but a kind of a door is reared up to keep the
wolves from stealing our meat our bed is put up so high that we
can sit under it and the stove close [is] up in a corner.

You may wonder why we don't make a house [of] boards. Well
I never told you anything about the mill business I believe so I will
do so now. In the first place the mill was late getting here, then
the roads were very bad which made everything go slowly. It was
so rainy that we could do almost nothing for a long time and it has
only been within the last three weeks that we have made much
progress. Besides all that we employed a man to build the mill who
proved himself to be quite incompetent and while Ell was up to
Kansas [City] I got out of all patience and gave him his walking
papers, and forthwith hired two men both experienced in their line.

2. Frederick P. Stanton was secretary, and twice acting governor, of Kansas territory
from April 16 to December 21, 1857.
one an engineer, the other a preacher just from [Iowa] who is an excellent sawyer. I did not employ the latter one to preach, as I don’t know much about his experience in that line but in line of sawyer I meant. The weather is very fine again and we expect to start the machinery in two or three days. We would have made enough by sawing to have paid the expense of erecting the mill, easily, if these men had taken it in hand from the start. Ed and I worked at rebuilding for a week which was more than would have been required to do the work right in the first. We thought some queer words—out loud—most every day we were at it.

I dont know how well you are posted in political news but I will give you the latest. The Freestate legislature when they met [at Lecompton, December 7-17, 1857.] repealed all the bogus laws. Made Gen. Lane commander in Chief of the Territory with power to organize a militia and he has already done so. He is now here but what his intentions are we know not as he keeps, the troops even, in ignorance. Before he came down we could learn all about the movements of the army and the ruffians understood there plans as well as any body. We heard to-day that the bogus capital, Lecompton, is in ashes, but nothing of the why or wherefore. Several hundred men are encamped in the neighborhood and squads of horse-men are passing to and fro almost continually. Last Monday was the day to vote on the constitution which was framed by the proslavery-National-democrats. Have heard nothing of the result, only know that the polls were not opened in this precinct. The legislature, elected by the people of Kansas, last October, have appointed the 4th of January next to vote for or against that constitution, all who have a right to vote will put in, that day. . . .

My Dear Wife

Sugar Mound Jan 2nd 1858

I have no news to tell you this time, I believe, unless it is that we have, at last, raised the steam and got our mill to working. . . .

Your affect. Husband

My Dear Wife

Sugar Mound Jan 9th 1858

. . . Don’t . . . let anything here trouble you in the least for I can assure you that the only trouble we have, now that the mill is doing business, is the vexation of housekeeping and that you know is, by no means, of a serious nature. . . .

3. The election on the Lecompton constitution occurred on Monday, December 21, 1857, and resulted as follows: for the constitution, with slavery, 6,226; for the constitution, without slavery, 569. It was reported that 2,720 illegal votes were cast in the election, at which the Free-State partisans abstained from voting.
As to the wars which I see are reported in the papers, if you don’t feel any more concern about it than what we do, you won’t lose a moment of sleep. . . . That there has been warlike demonstrations here, right in this place, I don’t dispute, but I can say truly that there is no probability of the people here at Sugar Mound being molested for two reasons. There is no particular cause and if there was we are to many for them. We have no fear so I hope you won’t, and now for every thing that I can think of. We have done some washing with the creek water and find it soft. Are you not glad, its so handy too. We bought a bag full of apples, real nice ones for $1.25 per bushel. Plenty of them in the State [Missouri], within a days drive. . . .

I have learned that there are nurseries over in the state where trees can be had at $1.50 per dozen,—we have a few on our claim, set out last spring—so much nearer than any point on the river that nobody in this county would ever go to the river for trees. Most everybody has oxen and it requires eight days or more to make the trip. That is too long a time to be getting one load of trees when they can get them out of the nursery and be home in four days at most. I have no opportunity of knowing what chance there may be along the river but suppose that there may be good sale within twenty or twenty five miles and probably much farther in the direction of Lawrence. They would, however, have to be shipped in the fall as they could not be sent to the territory before the season would be too far advanced. That however is a matter of opinion. . . .

We were so late getting the mill to running that we have given up the building of houses this winter. We are engaged in putting a two story building over the mill seventy feet long and twenty six wide at one end with an offset over the boiler making it about thirty four feet at the other end. It will keep us all winter, save time enough to build something to move into next spring, before we start home. A good stable will do for a few weeks I guess, rather than wait here to build a house. . . .

Love to the children and Kiss them for me. Husband

Sugar Mound, Jan 18th, 1858

My Dear! Wife

Last Saturday was my day to write you but I was prevented from getting a letter in the mail that day, by our work which was going on furiously all day, and then I was so tired of nights that I went to roost immediately after supper and, besides, last week was my week
to get the meals. This week and next I will be out and can have
time, of evenings, to read some before supper and when not too
tired can put in an hour or two after tea. Oh dear! how tired I am
of keeping ‘bach’ Nothing but the interest I feel in seeing the work
going on, enables me to stand it now. To-day I have been riding
all day partly on business connected with the mill and partly to get
signers to three road petitions, for roads branching off from Mound
City.

The weather is delightful, 55° to-day, warm sun, I enjoyed the
ride very much untiill after of it. We
don’t perform much hard labor, it is more care and anxiety than of
physical labor; we hire most of that done. We can saw 4000 ft of
lumber a day. We have not worked any after night yet. If we
were only living together here now I should like the business very
well. I think it will be much pleasanter than either riding around
thro’ hot sun or cold winds, rough roads and muddy roads, rainy
days and dark nights to peddle pills, or to raise crops and have to
watch them so much to keep them from being destroyed and then
to scarcely get enough for them to pay expenses. It will be
pleasant too to be near enough to places of public gathering to go
without riding several miles in the dark, over a rough or muddy
road, and to call on the neighbors too of an afternoon.

Maria⁴ had better keep in the notion of coming here. There is
no question about the school if she wants to teach. There is a
school house here but no school this winter. I have not heard of
any one who could be had to teach a school, who is capable. Ed
expressed himself as being very well pleased that Maria purposed
coming here, so that his boys could go to school. That was on our
way out, last fall.

Now my dear wife you must excuse me for another week for my
back aches, and, if I aint sleepy now, I will be in the morning at
getting up time— Your loving Husband

SUGAR MOUND JAN 24TH 1858

MY DEAR WIFE

We have had a pretty heavy rain since dark, last (Saturday)
evening. It ceased to-day about three or four o’clock. The creek
is pretty well up and the Falls are making a stunning noise. After
the rain, we went up to see how it looked. We tarried there untill
night gazing upon the, seemingly, angry flood, with mingled feel-

⁴. Maria Mannington, sister of Alice Trego. Maria came to Mound City in 1858 and
was married that year to J. S. Atkinson. This was the first marriage to take place in Mound
City.—Andress-Cutler, op cit., p. 1108.
nings of awe and admiration. Last night, during the thunder storm, there was but very little admiration of it (the storm) expressed and no awe as it takes reverence to make up that feeling. The expressions were a kind that indicated a different state of feeling when the warm rain began to spatter all over our berth. We have a very great deal of work to do and see after, our mill is not raised yet, that is, the house part, and we are exposed to the weather so much that it is a great disadvantage. Some days the wind blows the belt off, and saw-dust in our eyes so we can scarcely see; other days it rains and that, of course, puts a stop to the work entirely. But we are hopeful yet. With good weather as we have had we can have the mill building done in two weeks, and in two more we can have our houses so they will do to live in next spring, until we can finish them up on our return with families, if we can find them again.

Rainy weather will begin in a few weeks and we must have the mill sheltered before that time or we can do nothing at all.

Ed and self are bound to start just as soon as we can possibly get our buildings so they will do to live in, after we are done working on the mill. If there will be no delays, we can be off yet, by the first of March, we may not, however, for two or three weeks later. We have been wanting, all winter, to go to the Neosho to get some robes of the Indians, and a pair of ponies, we see no chance to get away and I fear it will be a failure. I would much rather ride across the country part of the way home than be at the expense of going all the way to St Louis.

Friday 28th [29th]—You see I did not get my letter off the first of the week, the reason is, that the mail was stopped by high water, having no bridges over the streams yet, and it was brot down to-day for the first [time] since last Friday. Now I must drop it in the office before the mail returns to-morrow for I've no doubt you are as anxious to see a letter about every week as I am. . . .

We had a hearty laugh over the Advertiser's account of a collision between the U. S. troops and those of Kansas. The fellow that got up that and some other Kansas yarns must have some of the stuff in his composition, that novel writers are made of.

Well, there is nothing like telling something stunning when the design of it is to produce a sensation. That fuss was all over and would have been forgotten but for the huge waves that roll back upon us in the shape of newspaper accounts swelled by every blow of letter writers for the papers. Before you get thro' with that job we will have another, worse yet, perhaps. I hope at any rate it will result, this time, in the destruction of Fort Scott. We had a town
meeting to-day The prospects for Mound City are indeed very flattering. The probabilities are favourable for its becoming the county seat and the Rail road from St Louis to Jefferson City, will, when extended on thro' the Territory, pass thro this valley and if Mound City can get to be somebody in two or three years, there is no reason why the R. R. should not pass thro its boundaries. . . .

Your devoted Husband

SUNDAY EVENING [JANUARY 31]—My love, I hope you will excuse my failure to drop this letter in the Office yesterday. It was not neglect but the being absent on business until it was too late. . . . I learned yesterday that the mail, on that day of the week, only goes to the end of our carriers route only a few miles, where it lays over untill the next Tuesday, so you see it will be not more than a day later at any rate. After this I will send my letters off in Tuesday's mail. Now I wish to send you news in advance of all the papers if the telegraph dont beat me, but they will have to wait untill the occurrence takes place, before they can send while I will guess what is to happen. The Bourbon County Banditti have been committing more robberies upon the settlers in that region and seem determined to have everything they can possibly make use of. They are allowed to do so because the pro slaveryites think they will drive away all Free State men by so doing. Such being the case there is no law to punish the theives. They even attempted to hang one man because he would not go away. The man is here at the Mound now. Captain [James] Montgomery was here this evening telling about the affair but I did not learn how the man escaped from the ruffians, but Montgomery told us that several Companies, his among the number, are in readiness to march upon Fort Scott to-morrow, for the purpose of destroying the place, scattering the band and perhaps to hang up the leaders of it to prevent them from making similar nests anywhere else. . . .

To be read last—The news which I referred to was the burning of Fort Scott. It aint done yet but will be I suppose, so you see, you get the news earlier than any body else)

MOUND CITY FEB 11TH 1858

MY DEAR WIFE

. . . To-morrow we raise the mill house. It will be a big job and all the help we can get will be required. It is cold this evening, raw east wind blowing into our parlor so that I feel like forsaking it and going up stairs to bed— Will write more tomorrow evening. Since writing the foregoing I concluded to
Photographs were made, were left by Theodore W. Morse of Mored City.

Burned by border warriors in 1859. The Armortex of 1859 from which this and the

This sawmill, built by Price and the Smiths on Little Sugar Creek in 1857, was
"Squally Ridge" because at one time 15 children lived there.

They arrived in 1888. The highest ground on which they stood was later known as the homes (left to right) of E. W. Smith, H. Treco, and J. K. Erwood Smith, and E. Erwood Smith. The house is at the right.
let this go by the board and write another, which I did this morning. Now am not satisfied with it either so I have concluded—just as Ed is getting ready to go to the office—that I will send both. I have only time to say that the freestate party—according to report of a messenger just in—have taken Fort Scott, without any fighting as the villians fled to save their bacon. There was some kind of treaty entered into about the future conduct of the people there which I consider of very little importance but a good deal of the stolen property was returned to the owners, however and promises enough for the forthcoming of some horses which the thieves took away with them. The day is very fine, snow is melting and E wants to go now to the office before the male [?] arrives so goodby again

Your loving husband

MOUND CITY Feb 13th [1858]

My Dear Wife

. . . We raised our mill yesterday and got thro’ without accident tho’ we very narrowly escaped having the chimney fall by the breaking of a guy rod caused by trying to lift a guy, on the opposite side from the break, to allow a part of the frame to pass under it as they were raising. Before we got thro’ it commenced snowing furiously and continued on after dark. This morning the snow is 5 inches deep. The first snow we have had worth calling a snow. Now I have about filled this up, so good by again for another week

Your aff husband

MOUND CITY Feb 28th 1858

My Dear Wife

Now I expect that by the time you get this you will think it has been a long spell since you received the preceeding one, and it has been two weeks now since I wrote you.

The reason of that is that I have been off a week, cruising around Went down into the Osage Nation, whilst we were out, to buy ponies, but we did not get any because the Indians wont sell them when thin in flesh. No matter what price is offered, they can’t be made to believe but that the person making the offer would give more for the pony after he fattens up in the Spring. We were some little disappointed in not getting ponies, but we had a pretty good trip of it and saw a great deal of fine prairie and fine timber which will soon be open for settlement, at least we were told by Indian traders, agents &c in the nation, that a treaty was likely to be effected this spring with that tribe. Ed and one of our hands
and myself, with a driver to take us, constituted the company. The first evening out we encamped on the Little Osage river, where I shot a wild cat out of a tree near the woodchopper’s cabin which we went into to cook our supper. The cat was run out from under the floor of the cabin by the dogs. The next day our road lay across a large prairie where we saw nothing all day but wolves and one flock of deer. At sunset we came within sight of a house. We tried to get on to Cofachique, on the Neosho, but failed to reach it, tho’ it was but four miles distant. We encamped on the prairie. The day had been perfectly clear and the sun was shining too hot to feel comfortable. We regarded it as prognostic of storm but did not think it would come on so suddenly as it did and with such violence too. We were too conscious that we were exposed, in the after part of the night to a perfect gale of wind, cold and raining, which covered every thing with sleet, and before day it turned to snow. When light enough to see, we started for the town, the snow flying so thick that we could see but a few rods ahead but were soon enabled to make our way without difficulty, but the fences. It was very cold and we stopped at the hotel,—the only building in the place capable of accomodating us—and made ourselves at home until the next (Monday) morning. The house, up stairs, was full of snow as was every building in the town. While we were stopping there, a family came up from the Virdegris, where they moved last fall. The family consisted of a woman and several children who were left alone some weeks ago by the man who went away for the ostensible purpose of getting provisions, of which they were sadly in need, and they have heard nothing from him since. He is an inebriate. The family were suffering from want of food and clothing. Fortunately summer is near by when they wont need much only in the eating line. The villagers furnished them with a house and provisions and, being invited to contribute something we furnished each of the little chaps with a pair of shoes.

On Monday morning it was very cold but the sun came out clear and having the wind to our backs we had a pleasant drive of it. Night came on long before we arrived at a stopping place, but a team was just ahead of us and we followed their track, the only one to be seen since the snow. It is very seldom that wagons are seen so far down among the Indians. We arrived at the post of a trader about 9 o’clock and put up their for the night. A village of several

5. Cofachique, Allen county, was established in 1855 about two miles southwest of present Iola. It was the county seat from 1855 to 1858, and soon thereafter the townsite was abandoned.
hundred Indians is close by the post. Many of them were in the eating house where we got our suppers. there is no white woman here. The trader has a very respectable looking squaw in his part of the establishment and a slave to wait upon her. In the kitchen there was another squaw who done the cooking for the trader and his assistants and any one who might chance to be travelling that way as was our case. I had a tolerably good bed, the rest rolled themselves up in buffalo robes and slept on the floor. The team which open[ed] the way for us so far, also stopped here, the men were on a trading expedition and had a lot of prints and jewelry. We played euchre untill midnight, the only time I have played since coming into the territory. In the morning we went to the Indian village, the wigwams made of buffalo skins, and took a look around at the fashions. Ed and I were objects of great curiiosity to the grown people because of our unmutilated beards being covered with a good coating of frost, the morning being very still and frosty, But the worst of it was that when I went into a wigwam where there was a lot of children they all began to scream and dodged out like frightened cats as soon as I was far enough inside to leave room for them to pass out behind me. One little fellow, who, no doubt, told the rest that he wasn't afraid, came back and lifted the robe which hung over the entrance was coming in all so fast but he gave a yell and “pop went the weasel” I regreted very much that I had no trinkets to give them but I told an Indian who could speak English that I expected to be down there again before they started on their summers hunt and would bring the little fellows some presents, to make friends with them. We saw a buffalo here, that has been tamed. Our travels to-day were thro' the country where the Indians have erected their wigwams in considerable numbers from a dozen to twenty together and these villages a few miles apart. We arrived at the Osage Mission 6 by the middle of the afternoon and having gone about as far south as we wanted to this time we started home by the way of Fort Scott, and got far enough out to find a first rate camping ground without fear of having anything stolen from us by the Indians. The next day we started early and traveled towards home as far as we could; intended to get into Ft Scott and have a good supper and beds to sleep in but could not possibly do it. Went in before breakfast the next morning tho not untill breakfast was over at the hotels. After

6. The Osage Catholic Mission, at present St. Paul, Neosho county, was founded in 1847 as a mission and school for the Osage Indians living along the Neosho and Verdigris rivers.
breakfast we took a look around town, went to see a new steam mill—same make as ours—that was only started the day before. I have seen five mills besides ours and only one of them is equal to it, that one is no better only in the management of the saw, which is done by one of the owners who understands a saw better than any man we can hire in the territory. The town of Ft. Scott is handsome the houses being all large and built hotel fashion. It was used by the U. S. troops as a boarding place when not required to be on duty. The buildings are arranged in a square with a fine Plaza inside planted with trees which are of probably eighteen years growth, the broad steps from the second story varanda of each house toward the open square or plaza and a fine well under a clump of trees, with a tasteful structure over it supported by six round pillars. We were in to much of a hurry to get home or we could have seen the U. S. troops come in there that day, they having been sent there again to prevent the freestate men from destroying the town. If we had been two days later in getting along we might not have been allowed to go & come without some trouble as the free state men are collecting in considerable numbers, with cannon, determined to make them give up the thieves that are harbored there or destroy the town. Every house in it would cost $3000, in Illinois. Much more than that here. We arrived at Sugar Mound very late at night, having stopped at the Fort some two or three hours—Well I have filled up my paper with an account of my trip, I see, and as there is no news or anything else of special interest I will let it go at that. . . . Good bye my dear wife and all the love to you which I am capable of bestowing on the best of good women is yours— Husband

[Part Two—the Letters of 1861, 1862—Will Appear in the August, 1851, Issue]