

Documents

SOME LETTERS TO WILLIAM PLUMER

Edited by LYNN W. TURNER

The following excerpts are from letters found in the Plumer Collection in the State Library at Concord, New Hampshire. They are offered as interesting comments on the West of 1816, seen through Yankee eyes. These letters were destined for William Plumer, who was soon to become Republican governor of New Hampshire, although they are addressed to his son, who was acting somewhat in the capacity of his father's secretary, at the time.

William Plumer, Jr.
Epping, N. H.

Charleston Brook Court House
Virginia¹

January 5, 1816.

I am not so enraptured with this country as the people of New England generally are who have not seen it—and Emigrants from N.E. will be much disappointed—I am told there are many who wish they had never come but know not how to get back—There are some richer lands here than I have ever before seen—the bottom Intervals on the Ohio—but they bear a higher price than any lands in N.H. And uncultivated lands cannot be obtained at so low a price as they can either in N.H. or the Prv. of M. [Maine]². The only advantage they have is in raising Indian corn and wheat—but it takes a bushel of wheat to buy a pound of loaf sugar and a bushel of corn to buy a pound of brown. My lands in N.H. and Maine have risen in my estimation an hundred percent since I came here.—I believe the tide of emigration will stop—probably there may be a reflux—The U.S. lands not entered upon are generally of little value except those remote in the Indiana and Illinois Territories—The good lands are in the hands of Speculators of which Class of Gentlemen the State of Ohio abounds. These have had the address to turn the brains of the New Englanders and others wanting to make estates for themselves and families and they must pay these gentlemen for the lands they get, a round price—say from seven to fifteen—and in some cases twenty-five dollars per acre—The Country is very rough and broken—much waste land and there are no good roads—I think it unhealthy—Should you wish a more

¹ William Plumer, Jr., was the eldest son of William Plumer, the governor. At this time he was reading law in his father's office in Epping, after having graduated from Harvard in 1809. He was later a Congressman and a useful public servant in New Hampshire. Livermore was writing to the elder Plumer partly in connection with legal questions regarding his land holdings in New Hampshire.

² Maine was a part of Massachusetts until 1820. In the early part of the nineteenth century, it was a real competitor of the West for New England colonists.

particular description of the Country I may be able to give it to you after further examination.

Edward St. Loe Livermore³

William Plumer, Jr.
Epping, N. H.

Charleston Brook Court House
Virginia

March 17, 1816

I am persuaded that the rage for emigration will abate when the people of N.E. get fully appraised of the difficulties they have to encounter and the true nature and price of the lands in this country—I do not wonder at the people of Connecticut and south of there migrating—they have not lands to purchase in their own States—but the people of N.H. and Mass. who can buy such lands in the District of Maine are fools to come here for anything they can get.

At this time Indiana is the rage—that is the land of promise—just as Ohio was formerly—but Ohio being now thoroughly explored is found not to be the land—but Indiana being more distant and few knowing anything about it, has undoubtedly gotten the Garden of Eden in its bowels which has been lost ever since the flood—But when Indiana is settled and they don't find the spot—then Illinois or Mississippi territory or Louisiana or some other place will contain it—I have seen a man since I have been here—a brother of Capt. Morris of Berwick, who knows where it is—he has found it up the red river—and as I told him it was too far off for me to go and explore he could safely indulge in all the extravagances of description. But as I have been sady disappointed in Ohio I shall suspend my opinion until I am able to gratify my curiosity by inspection or have otherwise better information. A man who has returned from Indiana where he has been assisting in surveying Lands which are to be sold next summer—says there are some very excellent Lands which are expected to bring ten and twenty dollars per acre—but the tracts of good land are not extensive and the other lands of Indiana are similar to the lands in other places just as the men are—mere men and not angels. A gentleman of the City of New York who was formerly in the — company — a farm in New Holland⁴—and there he says are the best lands in the world—and I believe him as well as all the others—at the same time think that while the people in Mass. and N.H. can so easily obtain lands at

³ Edward St. Loe Livermore was in the sixth generation of a famous New England family, the son of a United States Senator and brother of the Chief Justice of New Hampshire. He studied law with Theophilus Parsons of Newburyport and practiced in Concord, Portsmouth, Newburyport and Boston. He also held responsible judicial offices and represented Essex County in Congress. Shortly before writing this letter, at the age of fifty-four, he had moved to the frontier with a family of ten children. The brood was increased by one in June, 1816. Livermore spent some time in Zanesville, Ohio—somewhat unhappily if we may judge by these letters, and returned to Tewksbury where he died in 1832. It was after he left Ohio that he wrote these letters, and his references were not to lands now in West Virginia, but mainly to Ohio lands. His poor opinion of western land, expressed in these letters to a man of considerable importance in New Hampshire, may have been influenced by his own extensive speculations in land on the northern frontier. Charlestown C. H., county seat of Brooke County, later became Wellsburg. This place is on the Ohio about twelve miles above Wheeling.

⁴ The blanks indicate three words that are illegible in the original manuscript.

home where they are both acquainted with soil climate and productions they are great fools if they emigrate to any of these places.

Edward St. Loe Livermore

William Plumer, Jr.
Epping, New Hampshire

Charlestown, Indiana Territory
April 11, 1816

The Emigration from the eastward into this Territory this spring is prodigious—three hundred families have arrived at Jeffersonville in the course of the two past weeks but from some cause the settlers in this Territory are not so wealthy I believe as the settlers in either of the other Territories—Charlestown (the place where I now reside—I keep a tavern) is a flourishing little village with several large brick Houses & seven or eight smaller ones with an Elligant Court House, offices, Market House, etc. etc. Three miles from this place a Capt. John Workes has undertaken and succeeded in digging & blasting a race through a sollid [*sic*] rock the length of which is one hundred & five yards, the height of the race is six feet, and its width four feet, by making a dam of two feet said works turnes the water of a large stream called fourteen mile creek & in passing the race gets 22 feet fall. No settled plan has yet been agreed upon for taking advantage of the water—Iron Works (parnous) Cotton Manufactures &c—are talked of—Iron ore is said to be found in abundance 12 miles from here....This Country affords apples & Peaches in abundance—cider can be had at this time of the year at from four to five dollars per barrel and Apples at from \$2.50 to \$3 per barrel.

This Territory is settled princibly [*sic*] by people from North Carolina Virginia & Pensylvania some few from Massachusetts Connecticut and New York. The lands are very productive generally.

Stephen Rannay⁵

⁵ Colonel Stephen Rannay had written to William Plumer on February 3, 1816, asking that the latter use his influence and exertions in procuring for the veteran a small federal post in which to spend his declining years. Rannay claimed a total of sixteen years military service in two wars. He was apparently a New Hampshire emigrant to Indiana Territory. His letter was written as a letter of thanks after William Plumer, Jr., had assured Rannay that the elder Plumer was active in Rannay's behalf. It may be noted that the old soldier was not quite so literate a correspondent as the aristocratic Livermore, but he seemed able to appreciate the good qualities of the frontier more keenly. Charlestown, Indiana, is about fifteen miles, and almost north, from Jeffersonville. The town is a short distance from the Ohio. Charlestown was the county seat of Clark County from 1810 to 1813, when Jeffersonville, which had been the county seat from 1802 to 1810, supplanted its rival.

A VISIT TO NEW HARMONY IN 1883

Letter of Edward Travers Cox

The letter here reproduced from the Indianapolis *News* of October 31, 1883, was written by Edward Travers Cox while visiting New Harmony.¹ Mr. Cox was born on April 22, 1821, in Virginia. His father moved to New Harmony

¹ This New Harmony letter written by Mr. Cox was kindly brought to the attention of the editor by Miss Esther U. McNitt, Director of the Indiana History Division of the State Library.