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LETTERS FROM THE PAST

In 1844, Timothy E. Ranney and his young wife, Charlotte, journeyed west to the land of the Pawnee Indians as missionaries. They went with courage and faith and became established in their work, but danger and death were at hand, and they moved to safer territory near Council Bluffs. Now we learn of the final decision to return home. This series of letters and extracts from Charlotte's journal began in the April 1953 issue.

Part IV

24.

“Attended meeting to-day. The ten commandments were read and expounded in Pawnee, and some remarks were made in English on the passage in Job, ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth’ . . .

Feb. 1, 1847. . . . Heard to-day that a company of fifteen men were to be sent back to the Pawnees in the spring for the purpose of protecting the whites and assisting in farming operations. The truth of this we do not yet know.

Feb. 2, 1847. The Missouri Chief came in this morning for his breakfast but as he was too late for that he came and took supper with us.

Feb. 3, 1847. There has been little variation in my accustomed round of daily duties except that Mrs. Platt came in and spent the afternoon in singing. She mentioned some things about Pawnee affairs that were news to me. She is expecting to go back to our old home sometime next spring although she anticipates visiting her friends in the East first. I am not decided which way to go and mean to be ready to go where Providence may dictate. I hope, however, that we shall take up our line of march some time soon to where we shall have some prospect of usefulness. Perhaps I am committing a sin in wishing for a more extended sphere of usefulness and not doing that which lies within my reach here. I endeavor, however, not to let all my time run to waste even here. There are many little acts of kindness which I can perform for those about me.

Feb. 4, 1847. This afternoon agreeable to engagement went to hear Mrs. Platt's children read. Some of them have made rapid improvement and the others have done well. Before I left Judge McIlroy

came in and conversed a little. He told me he would call again this evening. Accordingly before I had my supper table out of the way he came. He had been here but a few minutes before he introduced the subject of going out to the Pawnees. He stated he expected to go out this spring with some fifteen men with him for protection. We were treated with politeness, and he said he would do all in his power to forward our plans if we went out there.

Feb. 5, 1847. I have been in a state of excitement today in consequence of our conversation last evening. I think I am willing to be guided by Providence when the path of duty shall be clearly made known. . . . This afternoon Timothy and I took a walk out upon the river but as the ice was covered with water we did not prolong the walk far. Found a few shells on the sand bar near the center of the river.

Feb. 5, 1847. The sky was overspread with clouds this morning and threatened a stormy day. A little before noon the clouds began to disappear, and this evening the stars are cheering us with their enlivening presence. Mrs. Allis came and spent the afternoon here. She is evidently somewhat disturbed by the course Pawnee affairs have taken. She made some inquiry about some property in the possession of the mission which she said belonged to her. . . . We have been somewhat disappointed in not receiving letters from friends today as we anticipated. We hope that our little trials and disappointments will do us good and lead us to look to higher sources for our enjoyments. . . . Have heard to-day that the Pawnee village where our mission was located was entirely destroyed.

Feb. 7, 1847. The Sabbath. How different is the voice of mirth and revelry on this Holy day from the peace and quiet I was accustomed to see in my native home. Here the Sabbath is most shamelessly desecrated and wickedness stalks forth unrebuked. How is human nature debased and degraded. Were it only the heathen that thus openly profane Holy time and violate the Divine law there might be some excuse for it. But it comes from those from whom we might expect better things. But why am I so indignant with those who so unblushingly go astray? I have reason to fear that there is indwelling sin and a heart not perfectly passive in the hands of my Saviour within. Oh Lord take from me every selfish desire! Help me to utter the prayer of thy ancient servant 'Oh Lord revive thy work!' We were addressed on these words to-day. The tenth chapter of Mark was read in Pawnee.

Feb. 8, 1847. . . . If nothing is done within a day or two we have

concluded that we have stayed here long enough. We shall return to the land of our nativity. . . . This evening a blind Omaha came in and after making a short speech commenced singing most lustily. As I supposed, he was trying to purchase bread by his music. I preferred giving it to him to hearing his noise. I gave him some and he soon went away. He reminded me of those music walkers who are to be found in our cities.

Feb. 9, 1847. Near night we were surprised by the appearance of Mr. Stevens, Mr. Woodcock and Mr. Crow all wishing to go to the Pawnees. The Agent also called and took supper with us.

Feb. 10, 1847. The three men who called here yesterday have been back and forth at their pleasure, all were here to dinner. They seem to think the prospect of the Pawnees is rather dark. They are anxious to go out there if possible. . . . The Agent on his way to the States called and bid an affectionate farewell. He is not expecting to return till April.

Feb. 11, 1847. Our Missouri friends left us early taking two letters to the office for us. . . . This evening heard that three or four Pawnees are on their way hither. They are coming to bring word that some of their number killed two white men and robbed their wagons last fall and see if the Agent has any ears for them.

Feb. 12, 1847. Agreeable to our expectations our Pawnee friends visited us. I was gratified to see them. The Chief did not appear to expect to get his whites back as his people had been robbing and killing those with whom they had fallen in.

Feb. 13, 1847. The Pawnee chief came in and appeared to be in better spirits than yesterday. He says if his white people will go back all will be well.

Feb. 14, 1847. The Sabbath. Our Pawnee friends came for breakfast and stopped till after devotions. I told them that it was the Sabbath and we were to have religious exercises. They expressed some pleasure and spoke as though they would be present, but saw nothing of them until after meeting when the Chief came and took supper with us. He said he had been to see some of the traders which was the occasion for his not being present at meeting. He has some fears for his people as they had been killing white men and he fears the President will chastise them for it. Just before dark he came in again to make some inquiries about taking a Pawnee woman, who has spent the winter here, for his concubine while he may stay. We expressed our disapproval. How much weight it may have with him we cannot tell.

Feb. 15, 1847. Mr. Grove called this morning and Timothy went with him to the Mormon camp. He did not return till late and I began to have some anxious fears that he might have to spend the night up there. He has, however, returned quite tired and lame though I think it will have done him good to have taken the ride.

Feb. 16, 1847. Found time to make Mr. and Mrs. McKinney a call. She made one statement which I rather disapprove. She thought a missionary ought not to extend hospitality to strangers without compensation. Our Savior did good to all as he had opportunity, even to his enemies as well as to strangers. Shall we be so greedy of filthy lucre as not to accomodate a stranger in need without requiring his money? . . . Just before it was entirely dark we were surrounded by a company of Omahas who came with sticks and rattles, stood about our door and sang most lustily. Their music was not very enticing, but I like to hear it. After they had finished singing they came and looked in the window, as I supposed, to see if they were to have any food.

Feb. 17, 1847. The Pawnee Chief spent most of the forenoon here in better spirits than yesterday. Coon Skin came in and sat a while. They appeared to enjoy talking of bygone days, but present aspects troubled them, especially the Chief. He is fearful that the Omahas will get into trouble with his people and in that case he cannot return to his home in safety.

Feb. 18, 1847. Agreeable to my expectations Mrs. Platt with her family visited us. We spent most of the time in singing. During our sing we attracted many listeners to our door among whom was Mrs. Papin. She came in and sat some time without speaking. At length I was attracted to the door by the cry of children. Mrs. Papin improved the opportunity of slipping a little pair of moccasins into my hand and then rushed out of the house.

Feb. 19, 1847. Six o'clock found me sleeping this morning which is not a very common occurrence. The sky was overcast and some snow had fallen during the night. The window shutters had been closed to prevent any intrusion from drunken Indians, one having been brought into the yard who was disposed to fight, so he was bound hand and foot. The room being dark probably contributed in some measure to my drowsiness. . . . This evening soon after dark we were alarmed by the cry of fire. It proceeded from the Pawnee shop and may have been the effect of carelessness though I do not know.

Feb. 20, 1847. . . . It has been dull and stormy and a portion of our floor has been wet most of the day.

Feb. 21, 1847. The Sabbath. The wind had abated when we awoke but on getting up found that we had plenty of work to do as our house was filled with snow from top to bottom. Did not breakfast till about nine o'clock, it having taken till that time to dry ourselves. About noon I went to the upper loft to see if anything could be done to stay the rain or snow water that was constantly dripping upon us. I worked some time and succeeded in stopping it in most places. The consequence is that my limbs are quite painful and I am very tired. Did not have a meeting to-day on account of the hard traveling.

Feb. 22, 1847. Rose early and went to washing found it very cold but was surprised to learn that the mercury stood at fourteen degrees below zero.

Feb. 23, 1847. This evening Timothy came in and said the time had expired which he had set as a limit for us to stay here in suspense. He was somewhat depressed at the thought of leaving the Pawnees. . . . A Pawnee woman came in to whom I showed sister Ellen's picture. She looked at it with a great deal of attention. Later another woman came in and enquired for it that she might see it.

Feb. 24, 1847. Early this morning the Pawnee Chief and his attendants came in and took breakfast with us. As the Chief expressed a wish to see Judge McIlroy, Timothy went to call him but he had gone. Mr. Deroin, however, returned with Timothy and they had some talk which however amounts to little as the Chief was not decisive in anything he said. At length he was called to feast. Mr. Deroin later returned saying that he had pressed the Chief to express his mind fully. The Chief finally said he was determined to settle on the Otoe's land, and if the government was willing to send him his white men it was well and if not he would submit to it. If he remains fixed in his decision we shall probably go East at no very distant period. Toward night the Missouri Chief came in and told us of the Pawnee's decision. . . . Have been busy most of the day clearing snow out of the house.

Feb. 25, 1847. Our Pawnee friends visited us as usual this morning at which time Timothy told them we were about to leave as they had thrown us away and did not wish us to return. He said we could do as we chose though he had not thrown us away. He had merely come here to consult with the Agent. While he was here he was called to feast which put an end to further conversation. . . . This evening our neighbors are playing games of chance and their horrid oaths grate sadly upon our ears. If any are given up to work out their own destruction it seems that these degraded Frenchmen and

Halfbreeds are the ones. Intemperance, licentiousness and gambling are their favorite amusements.

Feb. 26, 1847. Our retinue of Pawnee friends were here betimes for breakfast and before their wants could be supplied the Missouri Chief came for his also. They sat for sometime engaged in pleasant conversation. . . . This afternoon Timothy went over the River to see if he could hear of any trains going below next week. While he was gone we had such an exhibition of drunkenness as I do not wish to see repeated. The Missouri Chief ran at Mr. Pettijohn in a threatening aspect with all the fury of a maniac. When Timothy returned he brought two letters and said he had partly engaged passage for us to go below.

Feb. 27, 1847. A pleasant day, the ground has thawed considerably. Timothy went to Mr. McKinney's to see if he wished to make any purchases of our goods, as we have decided to leave as soon as maybe. This afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Allis came in and made some purchases.

Feb. 28, 1847. The Sabbath. Attended meeting to-day. Perhaps this is the last time we shall meet our Pawnee friends but could not realize it. The Chief and Mrs. Papin were present and gave good attention.

Mar. 1, 1847. Several have come in and made some purchases. . . . Drunken Indians have been very plentiful about here and have made considerable noise.

Mar. 2, 1847. Very warm to-day. Water standing about the house several inches deep. . . . Indians have been very bad. One Pawnee woman ran in here for protection as she was persued by a drunken Otoe with a musket pointed at her. . . . We are hoping to get away from here tomorrow.

Mar. 3, 1847. Although we have labored hard we have not been able to get away. Mr. and Mrs. Platt called this morning and made some purchases. Mr. Allis and wife have assisted most of the day and we took supper there tonight. There is some prospect that we may get away in the morning.

Mar. 4, 1847. Took breakfast this morning at Mr. Allis' and started from the house at about ten o'clock. Did not however get accross the River till about one. . . . We have traveled about ten miles to-day in Pottawattamia Country. We saw several trees containing the bodies of dead Indians. Put up at a Mormon's and are to sleep in a room with fourteen or fifteen other individuals but feel grateful for such accommodations which are the best the country affords.

Mar. 5, 1847. Got an early start this morning and traveled about twenty miles. The country presents about the same aspect as it did yesterday. Walked some four or five miles and stopped in a house to wait for our wagons to overtake us. Put up at a Dutch family's and feel that my lot is not the hardest in the world.

Mar. 6, 1847. Did not start very early this morning. It thawed all night and the traveling has been bad. Came about fourteen miles and arrived at Hunciker. The house is the neatest and most comfortable we have seen since we left the Bluffs. We intend spending the Sabbath here.

Mar. 7, 1847. The Sabbath. Work has been suspended in the family here and we have had a tolerably quiet day though we have had no religious services. About noon several travelers came in. In the afternoon had some conversation with Mrs. Honsciker, found her a professing Baptist. She appears well but his health is very delicate. In the evening a Mormon lady came in and I showed the people my sister's miniature. Some thought she resembled me others thought not so much.

Mar. 8, 1847. Very cold this morning; however, we got an early start and crossed the Nishnubotna River, walked some seven or eight miles. We came to Judge McIlroy's about three o'clock where we shall spend the night. The Judge is intending to go to the Pawnees as soon as he may. He has quite a family, there being five children.

Mar. 9, 1847. The weather continues cold and there was some snow this morning. Started between nine and ten o'clock but did not travel far as it was very rough. Came two miles below English Grove and put up at the house of an Englishman. The people are very kind and do all in their power for our comfort. It is a delightful place but contains but few inhabitants.

Mar. 10, 1847. After traveling about two miles I discovered that my reticule was missing, as we had met two or three Mormon wagons I feared it was irretrievably lost. Timothy set back for it and found it about two miles beyond where we stayed last night. It had been picked up by the Mormons without any effort to find the owner. Came to Andrew Jackson's about nine o'clock. Found his wife very sick and his mother who is somewhat acquainted with Mrs. Dunbar, with them.

Mar. 11, 1847. Mrs. Jackson is somewhat better this morning but suffering considerably from medicine. Sold our mattress and started for Mr. Dunbar's a distance of about sixteen miles. Arrived here a little before dark. Mrs. Dunbar's health is quite delicate and I fear

will never be good. Had a very pleasant visit with Mrs. Dunbar though she is somewhat depressed in spirits and wishes to visit her friends in the East. Mr. Dunbar has purchased a place and intends finishing his days in Missouri. His present location is in Oregon but his farm is in another township.

Mar. 12, 1847. Timothy visited Mr. Dunbar's place with him this morning and is pleased with it. With many unpleasant sensations we left Mr. Dunbar and his family this forenoon about ten o'clock. Mrs. Dunbar urged that we should return and settle near them. After we had traveled a little distance I saw Eliza weeping and enquired the cause and found it the result of a strong attachment to Mr. Dunbar's family. . . . Crossed the Nodaway River with little difficulty. It is a long stream but has been fordable for nearly two thirds of the year where we crossed. Put up a little before night at a very pleasant family of Methodists. The people are from Ohio and enjoy more of the good things of this life than their neighbors.

Mar. 13, 1847. Our kind host refused to take any compensation from us this morning and said he should rather choose to give than to receive. Had a good deal of pleasant conversation upon the state of the heathen and their needs. A little past noon we came to Mr. Ware's, father in law to Mr. Crow. We stopped and took dinner and had a hearty invitation to spend the Sabbath with them. As we are in haste to get along declined and arrived at Savanna Hotel a little after dark. It appears to be a well regulated house and I promise myself a day's rest tomorrow.

Mar. 14, 1847. The Sabbath. Last night we had a room to ourselves for the first time since we left the Bluffs and we knew how to prize it. A Campbellite is to hold forth to-day and Timothy has gone with the children to hear him. I did not go on account of a sore foot. Since returning Eliza has had a slight chill. We have received every kindness from the acting landlady.

Mar. 15, 1847. This morning was very cold. We did not get a very early start. Timothy called at Mr. Carson's but did not find him at home. He saw his wife and was pleased with her appearance. He also saw Mr. Crow who was anxious to have us visit at his house, but as we had started we did not think it advisable to return. Mr. Stevens walked several miles with us and appeared like an old friend. Arrived at St. Joseph a little before sunset. Put up at the Mansion House kept by the brother of the landlord at Savannah. This evening Mr. Pierce and his wife called upon us. They were full of their jokes and of such a nature as I thought not becoming a

minister of the Gospel. He is a native of Massachusetts and his wife of Virginia.

Mar. 16, 1847. Took a tolerable early start and came to Bloomington about sunset. The road was very rough so we traveled about fifteen miles only. Put up at a very pretty tavern and for a new place tolerably good accomodations. The land lady is sick in the dining room and we are to sleep in the room with them.

Mar. 17, 1847. We are now at Weston. It is a new village and growing pretty fast. Put up at the Weston House which is very good. Found fourteen or fifteen gentlemen awaiting a boat for St. Louis.

Mar. 18, 1847. Mr. Pettyjohn left us this morning after which Timothy went to find Mr. Wright who bought a pair of overshoes for me so that I might visit at his house. He said he regretted our not putting up there in the first place as he had plenty of house room. I found he and his wife very pleasant Eastern people. She was from Vermont and he from Massachusetts. A little before noon a steam boat put in its appearance. Mr. Wright and Timothy went down and engaged us passage. We were anticipating a female prayer meeting when the bell rang for passengers. As we had some packing to do we made all possible haste but upon arriving at the boat we found that it was not going to start till tomorrow. We went back to Mr. Wright's and concluded to attend a phrenological lecture this evening. The lecture was rather prosy which the lecturer attributed to previous over exertion. After the lecture came on board the boat which is to start early in the morning.

Mar. 19, 1847. We were awakened this morning at dawn of day by the movement of the boat. As I was not disposed to sleep after we were in motion I got up and found a lady on board going to Fort Leavenworth. She entered into conversation and I found her very pleasing company. The boat came to her stopping place before breakfast so we had her company but a short time. . . . We have made several calls to-day and of course have not proceeded very far. Stopped at Liberty where we are to spend the night.

Mar. 20, 1847. . . . Heard the bell as soon as it was light this morning and before breakfast it was announced that there was another boat in sight. Did not come to it till near ten o'clock. Found it fast on a sand bar. . . . We are crowded with passengers and more constantly coming on board.

Mar. 21, 1847. The Sabbath. We are traveling to-day very much against my inclination as it is the Holy Sabbath. We excuse ourselves however upon the circumstance that there was no place to stop. We

have passed some very pleasant scenery to-day and stop at Providence for the night."

Here the entries in the journal are discontinued. We know, however, that the missionaries reached Westminster, Vt., some time in April, 1847 and remained there and in Ashby, Mass., until November when they again journeyed West, this time to the Cherokee Nation.

