

## Thomas Gregg's Letters to the New York Express

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## THOMAS GREGG'S LETTERS TO THE NEW YORK EXPRESS

BY PHILIP D. JORDAN

Although the newspaper and publishing ventures of Thomas Gregg, early nineteenth century editor in both Illinois and the territory of Iowa, have been admirably set down by Franklin William Scott,<sup>1</sup> David C. Mott,<sup>2</sup> and J. A. Gordon,<sup>3</sup> there are portions of Gregg's professional history which are yet vague and uncertain. Further, there are some newspapers edited and published by Gregg, such as the *Literary Cabinet*, established in the year 1833 at St. Clairsville, Ohio, and the *Western Gem and Cabinet of Literature, Science, and News*, established in 1834 at St. Clairsville which have become rare books. These newspapers published at St. Clairsville must, for instance, show the beginning of the literary friendship between Gregg and Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney,<sup>4</sup> yet I have been unable to locate a file or a single issue of either of the early Ohio publications.

It has long been known that Gregg, during the period of his editorship of the *Western Adventurer and Herald of the Upper Mississippi* in the year 1837, contributed a series of letters, under the general title of "Letters from the Occident," to the *New York Daily Express*, but it has never been fully established if the Montrose editor contributed one or more than one letter. Furthermore, the dates of publication in the *New York Daily Express* have not appeared in the works by Scott, Mott, or Gordon. Recently, I have examined the files of the *New York Daily Express*,<sup>5</sup> and have located Gregg's contributions.

Apparently Gregg sent to the *Express* only three letters, the first bears the Montrose date of June 28, 1837, and was published Wednesday morning, August 2; the second bears the

<sup>1</sup>See his *Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois, 1814-1870*. Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, VI. Bibliographical Series I, Springfield, 1910, pp. 45, 195, 286, 348.

<sup>2</sup>ANNALS OF IOWA (Third Series), XIV, 4, pp. 263-71.

<sup>3</sup>Compare *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVIII, 2, pp. 433-35.

<sup>4</sup>See Coggeshall, *Poets and Poetry of the West*, p. 238, et Venable, *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley*, p. 125. Also see my article "The Source of Mrs. Sigourney's 'Indian Girl's Burial'" which will be published in the November 1932 issue of *American Literature*.

<sup>5</sup>Files of the *Express* are to be found only in the following libraries: New York Public, New York Historical Society, American Antiquarian Society, and the Library of Congress. Consequently, Gregg's "Letters from the Occident" have not been readily available to the mid-western student.

Montrose date of September 5, and was published September 26; and the third was dated September 14 and published October 3, 1837. These three communications, then, form the collection known to the scholar of Gregg and mid-western newspaper history as "The Letters from the Occident." No more letters appeared in the *Express* for the remainder of the year 1837 and none for the year 1838. Therefore, I am almost certain that Gregg stopped contributing to the *New York Daily Express* after he left Montrose, or, to put it another way, after the *Western Adventurer and Herald of the Upper Mississippi* ceased publication.

I am reprinting here this collection of Gregg's letters in order that they may be accessible to Iowa students and in order that their contents may be preserved. Their publication, furthermore, will clear another of the dark spots in the journalistic career of Thomas Gregg. The letters are printed from photostatic copy without intentional emendation on my part.

## LETTERS FROM THE OCCIDENT—NO. 1

Montrose, Wisconsin Territory, (Head of the  
Des Moines Rapids of the Mississippi),

June 28, 1837.

To the Editors of the New York Daily Express:

Gentlemen:—I have headed this paper "Letters from the Occident," because, though not perhaps entitled to the distinction of a resident of the Far West, yet I think I am sufficiently *western* to admit of the application of *occidental* with somewhat of propriety. I am aware that the "Far West" progresses *westward*, at this day, with a rapidity heretofore unexampled; one or two years ago it was located at this place—five years ago and it was at Springfield or Jacksonville, in Illinois—and ten years ago, I question whether it had progressed farther than the Wabash at Terre Haute. Now it is almost as far from here as is "Down East." Travelers who have visited the Pawnee villages, Prairie du Chien, Council Bluffs, or Cantonments Gibson or Leavenworth, and those who have gone beyond any of these, as far as the city of Sundown, only claim to have seen the Far West. It is nothing to have been as far west as the Mississippi at

Montrose.—This is the name given by the new proprietors to Fort Des Moines, situated at the head of the Lower or Des Moines Rapids of the Mississippi River. The situation of Montrose is delightful, being on the edge of a high, rolling, and sandy prairie, the eastern border of which, where the fort is located, gently sloping to and commanding a fine view of the river. At the foot of the rapids, distant about twelve

miles from Montrose, is Keokuk, a small village receiving its name from a noted chief of the Sac and Fox Indians, who is at present the principal chief of those tribes. Keokuk is, and has long been, esteemed a place of considerable importance. It is situated at the foot of the rapids, five miles above Warsaw, and forty-five about Quincy, in Illinois.

The Des Moines River.—After a passage of two or three hundred miles through a most beautiful and fertile country, occupied principally by the Sac and Foxes and the Sioux tribes of Indians, empties into the Mississippi opposite Warsaw, five miles below the rapids which bear its name. This river divides, for the space of thirty miles from its mouth, the territory of Wisconsin from the state of Missouri. Certain politicians in Missouri are eagerly endeavoring to attach to that state the portion of country lying between the Mississippi and the Des Moines, from the mouth of the latter, up to the point where the northern boundary line of Missouri intersects said river—being a tract half as large as the little state of Rhode Island, and unsurpassed in beauty by any in the territory. To the proposition to annex, I would say NO, and I believe that almost every inhabitant would echo it back in a voice of thunder.

Half Breed Reservation.—The tract of land above mentioned, as claimed by Missouri, contains within its limits that tract of country set apart, I believe, at the close of the Black Hawk War, to the half breeds of the Sac and Fox Indians. One or two companies have for some time been busily engaged in purchasing the interest of said half breeds; and now the present claimants have united their interests, and the whole tract is offered for sale. Keokuk and Montrose are within this tract, the latter of which has become the headquarters of the company. The land office of the company has been opened at this place.

A printing office has just been put into operation at Montrose, from which is issued a weekly newspaper called the "Western Adventurer," and which will also soon issue a monthly sheet devoted to the history and description of the western country, to be entitled the "Western Emigrants' Magazine."

Mechanics and laborers who are thrown out of employment in the East, by the great pressure of the times, or, as a contemporary print says, the evils of too great a civilization—and who are looking to the West for a home secure from both, would do well to call at this place as they pass up the noble "Father of Waters," and view the beautiful farming country with which we are surrounded; or if they prefer getting as far as possible from the scenes of their distresses and of their childhood and youth, they can journey on even to the city of Twilight, ten degrees beyond Sundown, in the very *western* extremity of the Far West.

T. G.

## LETTERS FROM THE OCCIDENT—NO. 2

Montrose, Wisconsin Territory (head of the  
Des Moines Rapids in the Mississippi,)

September 5, 1837.

Gentlemen:—An important treaty has lately been concluded between the Government of the United States and the Chippewa Indians. It was conducted by His Excellency, Governor Dodge, of this territory—General Smith, the other commissioner, having been unable to arrive, in consequence of an accidental detention on the Ohio. The treaty was held at St. Peters (Fort Snelling), and was ended on the 29th of last month. It is said that more than 1,500 Chippewas, embracing twelve distinct bands, and about 500 Sioux, together with a vast number whites were in attendance. The treaty lasted fifteen days.

The tract of country thus obtained of the Indians, is supposed to amount to above nine millions of acres, embracing a very extensive pine region on the tributaries of the Upper Mississippi. It is bounded as follows:

“Beginning at the junction of the Crow Wing and the Mississippi rivers, between twenty and thirty miles above where the Mississippi is crossed by the forty-sixth parallel of north latitude, and running thence to the north point of Lake St. Croix, one of the sources of the St. Croix River; thence to and along the dividing ridge between the waters of Lake Superior and those of the Mississippi, to the source of the Ock-ra-sau-se-pa, a tributary of the Chippewa River; thence to a point on the Chippewa River twenty miles below the outlet of Lake Flambeau; thence southeasterly, on a course parallel with the Wisconsin and Pelican rivers; thence on an east course twenty miles; thence southeasterly, on a course parallel with that of the Wisconsin River, to the line dividing the territories of the Chippewas and Menomines; thence to the Plover Portage; thence along the southern boundary of the Chippewa country, to the commencement of the boundary line dividing it from the Sioux, half a day's march below the falls on the Chippewa River; thence with said boundary line to the mouth of the Wahtap River, at its junction with the Mississippi; and thence up the Mississippi to the place of beginning.”

This tract of country, although lying for the most part, in the bleak and sterile regions of the north, is yet, in my humble opinion, one of the most valuable purchases that has been made from the Indians within the last ten years, and will greatly facilitate the settlement of the whole Mississippi Valley. Indeed, it may be regarded as an era in the history of western emigration. Inexhaustible quantities of pine grow upon the principal rivers within this extensive tract. So that, ere long, emigrants instead of being obliged to ship furniture, lumber, and even buildings from Pittsburg and Cincinnati, to almost every part of the Upper Mississippi, as they do at present and have heretofore done in many instances, will find it in the greatest plenty, by means of the navigable

ivers, at their very doors. Numberless sawmills will, without doubt, soon be erected within the newly purchased territory—and an impulse will be given to the prosperity of the west, heretofore unknown and unfelt.

The terms of the treaty are very favorable to the government, even much more so, than fair and just towards the Indians. The whole cost is something more than \$800,000—which for 9,000,000 of acres, would be less than nine cents an acre. This sum is to be paid them in various ways, in annual installments for twenty years; and I have no fear in hazarding the assertion that the tract will contain 300,000 inhabitants before the last installment becomes due. But enough of the treaty.

The agent of the U. S. Government passed up yesterday, on his way to Rock Island, with blankets and money, for the payment of the annuities due the Sac and Fox tribes of Indians. These annuities are paid to Keokuk, a chief of the tribes, who lives finely on the money,—and who, it is said, owes the American Fur Company more than the annuities will amount to for three years to come. Besides this he owes many thousand dollars to individuals, at various places on the Mississippi and Des Moines. Whenever the Fur Company gets clamorous for its dues, the chiefs will again be under the necessity of making overtures for the sale of another tract of land to the government.

As an instance of the justice and fairness of our government, in its dealings with the Indian tribes, I will first state the case of the above-mentioned chief, with that of the celebrated Black Hawk. The latter is a high-minded and honorable man—remarkably temperate in his habits—and, so far as I have learned, bears the good will of all his white neighbors. Yet he was degraded from his rank of chieftain, by the strong arm of power, and stripped of all his authority over his tribe; while the favor of the government was extended towards Keokuk, who was exalted to a high rank in the nation—was appointed caretaker of the annuities—and, who is withal, one of the greatest of *scamps*—a miserable gambler, and a drunkard. Keokuk was found to be more favorable to the grasping and ambitious designs of the whites, and more easily duped by their artifices,—whereas, Black Hawk had not only opposed their encroachments, but had lifted the tomahawk, and shed his blood in defense of his country and the bones of his sires.

Yours respectfully,

T. G.

#### LETTERS FROM THE OCCIDENT—NO. 3

Montrose, Wisconsin Territory (head of the  
Des Moines Rapids of the Mississippi),

September 14, 1837.

Gentlemen:—A delegation of ten or twelve individuals, from the Iroquois, or Six Nations, residing in the state of New York, and at Green Bay in this territory, passed here yesterday. They were accompanied by Mr. Schermerhorn, the United States commissioner, and are

on their way to the "Far West," to look at lands offered them by the government in the vicinity of Fort Leavenworth, on the south side of the Missouri River. They are good-looking and intelligent men, gentlemanly in their appearance and manners, and appear to understand well the business on which they are deputed. They represent a majority of their tribes at home as being unwilling to emigrate—state that they are doing well where they are—have generally adopted civilized modes of life—dwell in houses—have churches and schools—and live by tilling the soil, as their white neighbors do; and they think it not best to exchange all these immunities and blessings for an uncertain and precarious existence in the remote West, surrounded on the one side by savages and ferocious bands, and on the other by scarcely less savage whites. And they are right. If they know their own interests, they will remain where they are. They now have more security against the encroachments of the whites than they can have west of the Mississippi. How long will it be before they will again be surrounded by white men, eagerly preying upon the little reservation that may be left to them? And how long before they will *again* be urged to emigrate to lands still farther west, and to which the cupidity of the Anglo-Saxon race has not yet extended? Indeed, it has been but a short period since these same remnants of the Six Nations, now at Green Bay, were asked to give up their rich reservations in New York and remove to Green Bay, there to remain *forever*, in undisputed possession. Oh, what a *forever*! Six, eight, or ten short years roll along, and ere they had become fully settled in the quiet occupancy of their lands, lo! they are again asked to emigrate lands to some thousand miles further west, for the quiet and undisturbed possession of which—*forever*—the faith of this nation will be solemnly pledged.

While here, the deputation held a "talk" with a few of the Sacs and Foxes, who happened to be present. They stated to them the object of their mission—enquired for Black Hawk, who they had seen at Buffalo—expressed their wishes for his welfare—hoped he was in good health—wished to be friendly with him and all his tribe—and, on their departure, shook hands with them, as brethren of one great family—and as members of that one great family should do everywhere.

Yours respectfully,

T. G.

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