

## The Historical Value of Diaries and Personal Letters

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# ANNALS OF IOWA .

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## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

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### THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF DIARIES AND PERSONAL LETTERS

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The Historical Department of Iowa from its origin has been alert to discover and to acquire all materials at once bearing upon their face authenticity, and in their contents matter tending to establish or reveal historical truth.

In jurisprudence the verbal statement of a witness becomes competent only after it has the sanctity of his oath. Sanctity, therefore, is the first element upon which a student may rely in his examination of a statement, whether oral or written. It is the common experience of mankind that if one sets down events of daily life in a personal or private diary, it is with sacred care for accuracy and authority.

Much of the best literature of our race consists of or is drawn from epistolary statements wherein the writer was separated from the reader, as for instance the Pauline epistles. Thought committed to paper by a father for a son, a mother for a daughter, a leader for his adherents, embraces truth selected for value in establishing or continuing sacred relations.

Wherever in such a diary or such a letter allusion is made to Iowa conditions, to political issues and personages, to pending social matters of large or small importance, it is a specimen of thought or opinion safe to assume existed to a degree throughout the realms of intelligence and activity in which the author moved.

From such considerations the Historical Department has been vigorous in prosecuting a well defined purpose to obtain typical collections from the humblest to the greatest, of the writings of public and private individuals dealing with matters of interest in the state, whether written from a residence within or without. It has at hand the diaries of individuals who observed and exper-

ience the daily phenomena of public and private well being, and which were produced by natural or human causes. Thus we have of letters and diaries a collection almost adequate to the reading of the record from the earliest territorial days to the present time, from representative hands and hearts. Any history or fiction thus far written of Iowa has its counterpart or essence in the original writings among our manuscript collections, and any that shall be written may be judged from these infallible sources.

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### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MORMON TRAIL

The editor of the Annals has long been sharply conscious of the importance of the transportation of persons, property, and intelligence within and across our state before the arrival of the railroad and the telegraph. A study of the movements upon the Mormon Trail and its tributaries often discloses curious but interesting facts.

The Census of 1850 is the basis of the following observations:

The listing of products of industry as of the year ending June 1, 1850, for Van Buren County, was made by Charles Baldwin. The townships in Van Buren County served by the Mormon Trail and the Dragoon Trail and tributaries thereto, are shown to have been populated almost to the extent of the population of 1920. There was no railroad in the state. The California gold rush was in its inception. The return of the cultivated land area of that time shows but a fraction of the present area and a yield per acre usually less. The per acre value of improved land was \$10. The labor compensation was per man per day with board, 60 to 65 cents; without board, 75 cents; woman per week \$1.

The return of the products, studied with a view to determine the transportation problems of the time, shows, aside from agriculture, dependent almost solely upon wagon service, the following among other interesting enterprises:

At Pittsburg where a ferry transported a very large share of the travel westward across that county, William Funk had a distillery with an investment of \$500 and converted 2,000 bushels of corn and 200 bushels of rye, with the help of three male em-

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