

This is a typed version of the contents of a handwritten letter which was found among the papers of David Alexander Kivett (1859-1947) of Randolph County, NC. David Alexander Kivett was the brother and adjacent farm owner of William Manley Kivett (1864-1934), grandfather of William Daffron Kivett, husband of Nell Mulchi Kivett, presently of Taylors, SC. A copy of this letter was obtained from Peggy Kivett Eliason Cheshire, granddaughter of David Alexander Kivett, by William Daffron Kivett on 10/24/93. Mrs. Cheshire obtained the copy from other Kivett family members who have researched Kivett family history.

The letter was written by a sister of David Alexander Kivett's mother, Susan Forrester Kivett (1823-1896), the "Susan" referred to as addressee in the letter. The author did not sign her name other than "sister", so the name of the author is unknown, Susan is known to have had several sisters. The letter is dated as having been written from Genoa, Wayne County, Iowa, on March 29, 1871 and sent as a tale of this Carolina farm woman's travels to take up residence in Iowa, where other friends and relatives apparently were already residing. Although some parts are difficult to understand, being typed exactly as written, its contents and colorful expressions provide insight into the life of Carolina and Iowa farm people and travel in the late 1800's .

Genoa, Iowa
March 29, 1871

Dear Sister:

It is through the mercy of kind providence, I this morning have the pleasure of writing you to let you know we arrived safe to our journey's end. We got home the 5th day of March and have all been laid up with bad colds and cough but have got better and do hope these few lines may find you all well and also the neighbors. We got to Greensborough Monday evening. We took the cars Monday night half past one o'clock. We went on to Raleigh and there we changed cars. When I got to Weldon I thought it was the prettiest sight I ever saw, but it was nothing to be compared with Baltimore. I thought I never saw anything before, but when we got to Chicago I never can tell you what I saw such buildings you never saw and everything you can name. I saw a hundred boats all together after all the buildings. We took the boat at Baltimore about night. You better believe I felt a little frightened. We went into a large house. I did not know just then I was in a boat but I guess I found it out pretty quick. I was walking about in this big house and I felt it moving. The boat had then started. Odell took me up in the upper story to see the sea and that salt water. It was after night but I could see the water plain. I could not stand alone had to hold to Odell's arm. The wind did not blow much but the waves rolled and it was a sight to see. If the wind had been high I should have been frightened half to death but providence ordered it otherwise. I did not like no notion of sleeping in water all time of the night. I heard the water floating over the wheels of the boat you better believe I felt curious. We was in the boat all night and next morning till eight o'clock we landed safe to shore. You better believe I was a proud woman to get out of that house. Then we got into an Omnibus and rode to Chicago. There we laid by until four o'clock 5 minutes. We again took the cars. Mr. Staley you said it made you feel week in your legs. It did not frighten me at all. I liked to ride in the cars very well. I was a little sick on the road but got along better than I expected. The children faired sumptuously and had plenty of apples as large as you ever saw, oranges, cheese, candy, maple sugar chestnuts, fish, oysters. We had just what we could eat of everything that was good. The children did not seem frightened at all.

We landed at Melrose on Saturday about twelve o'clock and old gentlemen brought us to E. A. Park, that married Jane. We got to Odell's Sunday about twelve o'clock. Susan, you ought to have been here to see Betsy's actions when we got home. She did not walk out to the wagon she come running out and almost pulled me out of the wagon. It was awful to see how proud she was. She hung to me till Willi come out and told me to get out of the wagon. She said it was possible that some of her folks had come. She said she would die by me or I by her. She kissed the children and seemed to be over joyed. Betsy was sick while William was gone but was about when we come and she had a fine table set in amidst of people come and the house was filled. People here seem very familiar. William B. Odell has plenty to eat wheat, corn, meat, milk, and butter. Susan, you ought to see the milk Betsy has in the house not much less than a bushel, two cows with young calves, two more to have calves, two strippers. You never saw any cows. You have seen yearlings. Susan, you are waiting for your little black cow to have a calf. Susan, come out

of them rock piles. You can stay there but you don't live like the people in Iowa. After I got into the state of Iowa I saw rail pens filled with corn not covered, lots of corn on the ground for the stock to go to. I saw farms the stalk cut and it shocked in the fields. I saw them hauling and shucking it. Corn is as plenty here as rock is there. I have not seen a rock since I come to Iowa. Susan, forgot to tell you, traveled about 15 hundred miles the way we come.

Susan, you read this letter and send it to Mr. Staley. Tell Mr. Staley to let Mrs. Thompson see this letter and all my old neighbors. Let Mrs. Lineberry hear this letter read. Susan, I have seen all Betsy's children but Sarah and Franklin. Sarah married Bob Baster, Polly Ann married John Merit. Jane married E. A. Park, Madison married Rebecca Condry. Betsy's children have married independent. Jane's house is painted white is very fine. Jane looks as natural as life. Odell is in Illinois, Jacksonville. Anne Marie has a beau his name is Joseph Julian. Susan, Betsy says she wants to see you tell you not to stay there and work your self to death but little benefit. Jefferson Lineberry, come out here if you want to marry there are girls plenty very likely. I don't know what young men stay in North Carolina for.

Susan, Betsy says she has made between 4 and 5 hundred pounds of butter since last spring. Jefferson, you talk about old Jack being so large. E. A. Park has one three times as large. If you don't believe what I say, you need not any thing you hear. Susan, write quick. Tell Mr. Staley to write. Mrs. Thompson and all the neighbors. I still remain your sister until death.

Direct your letter to Genoa, Iowa, Wayne County.

Susan, Betsy can smoke as much as you can. She has plenty of tobacco, sugar and coffee. Susan, I send you some little pieces of my presents, a piece of my dress and drawer, and apron, people here dress fine every day.

It is apparent that the author was travelling with "Odell", maybe his last name. His relationship to her is not clear. Was this companion possibly her brother-in-law, referred to as "Willi" and "William B. Odell", the husband of "Betsy"? The author was also traveling with undefined "children", possibly hers and an unknown father. "Betsy" appears to have several married children that Susan would recognize by first names, one of whom is Jane who married "E. A. Park". This "E. A. Park" met the author and "Odell" near "Melrose", a town about a day's travel from "Odell's" home. This "E. A. Park" is said to have "one three times as large" as Jefferson Lineberry's "old Jack"; maybe the "one" is a mule. The "stripper" referred to is a cow nearing the end of a milk-producing cycle. It appears that both Susan and "Betsy" enjoyed smoking, "Betsy" having "plenty of tobacco, sugar and coffee". The Iowa people as described seemed to be generally prosperous for a time only about 5 years following the end of the Civil War. "--- people here dress fine every day". It is also implied that farm life then was not nearly so good in North Carolina. A then unmarried Jefferson Lineberry is known to have lived near the widowed Susan.

The "cars" referred to are possibly railroad cars; the North Carolina towns "Greensborough" (Greensboro), "Raleigh, and Weldon" she lists as passing through were known to have railroads. It is not clear where the boat ride around Baltimore went. It is possible that an overnight Chesapeake bay crossing or some canal trip was required to get to the "Omnibus" which carried them to Chicago. This "Omnibus" was probably not a streetcar since she implies that they rode it from near Baltimore to Chicago. There were no motor vehicles in this day, so it is possible that this was some sort of horse-drawn passenger wagon or stagecoach. Neither "Melrose" nor "Genoa" Iowa are listed on modern maps, but Wayne County can be located 50 miles south of Des Moines in extreme south central Iowa, near the Missouri state line.

William Daffron Kivett 11/08/93 [Updated 06/28/2002]