

“I’m 31, and I Believe Headed for the Top”: Louis L’Amour Letter

ONE OF THE JOYS of being an MNHS curator is that one never knows what exciting new find awaits.

Recently, MNHS acquisitions librarian Patrick Coleman appeared at my office door and said, “I have something that I think you’ll like.”

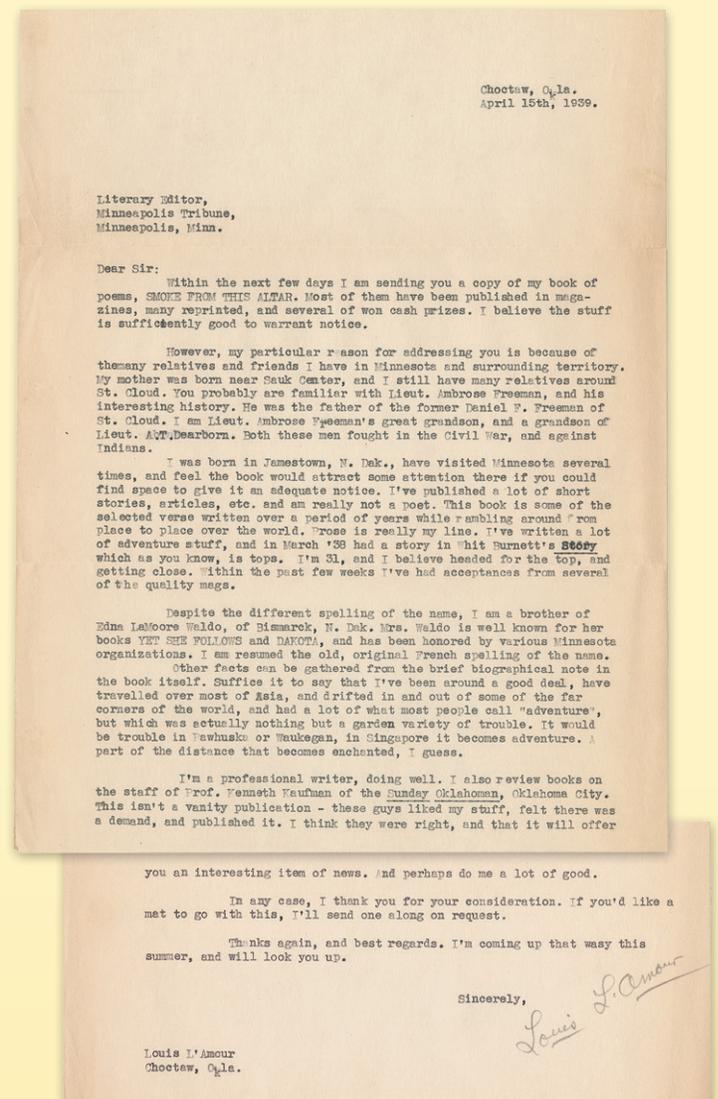
He handed me a typed letter signed by famed western writer Louis L’Amour (1908–88). Beyond the fact that thousands of Minnesotans continue to read his works, L’Amour’s Minnesota connections remain tenuous to most of us. Would it be appropriate to add this letter to the MNHS manuscript collection? A quick perusal of the letter indicates a resounding “yes.”

Writing on April 15, 1939, from Choctaw, Oklahoma, L’Amour addresses the letter to the literary editor of the *Minneapolis Tribune* and describes himself as “a professional writer, doing well.” He will be sending the editor a copy of his first book, a collection of poems entitled *Smoke from This Altar*. He has targeted the *Minneapolis Tribune* because of his connections to Minnesota: his mother was born near Sauk Centre; many relatives remain in the St. Cloud area; he is a great grandson of Lieutenant Ambrose Freeman and a grandson of Lieutenant A. T. Dearborn—Minnesotans who both “fought in the Civil War, and against Indians.”¹

He notes that he is the brother of acclaimed author Edna LaMoore Waldo of North Dakota (two of whose works are in the Gale Family Library at MNHS) and explains that he “resumed the old, original French spelling” of their last name. He unabashedly pronounces, “I’m 31, and I believe headed for the top, and getting close.” His prediction did not fail: his published work encompasses more than 100 volumes—including short stories, novels, and nonfiction—with hundreds of millions of copies in print.

With L’Amour’s Minnesota connections verified, merely having a L’Amour signature in MNHS collections would be noteworthy; having his signature over a substantive letter that he wrote is fantastic.

After cataloging, the L’Amour letter will be available in the Gale Family Library with a digitized version linked to the catalog record. The donor of the letter, a local rare book dealer, told Coleman, “This item belongs in your col-



Louis L’Amour letter

lection where it can be appreciated by the public and not simply in a private collection to be appreciated by a select few.” MNHS is grateful for such friends.

And as for that review request? From a search of the online index to the *Minneapolis Tribune* for 1939 and 1940, it appears that the newspaper did not give L’Amour the publicity he sought in this letter.

—Duane P. Swanson,
curator of manuscripts

1. Ambrose Freeman settled in Stearns County in 1857, served with the First Minnesota Mounted Rangers, and was killed in 1862 in Dakota Territory during the US–Dakota War. Abraham Truman Dearborn (1837–1911) married one of Freeman’s daughters; Dearborn fought in the Civil War with Company G of the Third Minnesota Regiment.



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