

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### PROMOTING SETTLEMENT IN THE SIXTIES

The following letter was written in 1864 by Spencer Armstrong, who emigrated from Indiana and settled in northern Faribault County, Minnesota, to Abraham Shanklin, a friend and former neighbor living near Owensburg in Jackson Township, Greene County, Indiana. It was found some years ago in an old box in a long-vacant family farmhouse by Shanklin's daughter, Mrs. Charlotte Brown of Jasonville, Indiana, from whom the present writer obtained it. With it Mrs. Brown found the remains of several other letters, written on similar stationery, but so badly damaged by mice that they could not be deciphered. The present letter was slightly mutilated in the same manner, making impossible the reading of some brief passages. Apparently Shanklin never followed his friend to Minnesota, for he lived and died in Indiana. Of the subsequent history of the Armstrongs, little is known to the present writer. The records of Faribault County show that in 1870 Armstrong received from the United States a patent on a piece of land that he and his wife sold three years later for a thousand dollars. It was later valued at over twenty thousand dollars.

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SPENCER ARMSTRONG TO ABRAHAM SHANKLIN, August 15, 16, 1864

[A.L.S.]

COBB RIVER P.O. WASECA COUNTY MINN.<sup>1</sup>

August the 15th, 1864.

DEAR FRIENDS: I seat myself this evening to let you know that I

<sup>1</sup> Cobb River post office was south of the Big Cobb River in section 32, Vivian Township, in the extreme southwest corner of Waseca County. See *Burrill's Sectional and Township Map of Minnesota* (St. Paul, 1870).

just received your welcome letter about 10 minutes ago. I am tremendous busy putting up hay but I will quit work any time to write to a friend that wants to move to Minn. We were glad you had better think to hear from you all. we are in common health for which we are thankful to the giver of ever good and perfect gifts. Now about the times, times are good except in way of Dry-goods, Wages are good, stock demands a good price, Wheat (old) 2 dollars per bushel (100) miles to market or less if you sell 20 miles from home (say 1.25) Now about crops: crops are very good and the season good. I suppose wheat will yield from 25 to 40 bushels, it did last season, and this has been a better season than last, corn looks well, Oats and Barley is good, Potatoes good, and the greatest country for them and turnips you ever heard of, I guess. Now about a Farm; there is all chances any man want, there is 160 acres of good land with (I am informed) 30 acres of timber on it and a small creek (called a river here) running through it, the water lasts all the year, for sale at 1200 dollars, there is considerable improvements on [*MS. torn*] Farm is 3 miles from me. If you [*MS. torn*] can surely suit yourself here now before land comes up which it will [*MS. torn*] year or two. But if you wish to Homeste[ad] one hundred and sixty acres you will have to go out too far west to suit you to get timber closer than 2 or 3 miles, that is my judgement now, you might do better if you were here to look around a little. You can get plenty of water any where (almoste) on the Prairies by digging 6 feet for stock and 10 to 25 for family use Abraham I could tell you a great deal about Minn. But it is useless, you or any other man can do well in this country. you say you cannot ask many questions, well I suppose I have answered all or nearly all you could ask. here your stock can get grass to eat all summer from 6 inches to 3 feet high, and you can cut and put up wild hay enough to keep all your cattle and sheep & not cost you one cent but your labor. it takes 3 tunn of hay for a cow bruit, and you can cut and put up 1½ to 2 tunn per day. now Abraham dont think bosh, for you will find it just so if you come out. Tell Miner Pate to think of coming too this country beats Illinois in a good many points, it is now night mu[*MS. torn*] moring and go to milk

Aug. 16th, Elizabeth is not well this morning.

This is the healthiest country I have ever been in. Now Abe if you come the sooner the better. There will be a big emigration again this fall, last spring was a great emigration Minn. is settling up very fast, and those who come first will do the best. One year ago there was about  $\frac{1}{6}$ th of this Township taken and now there is just 40 acres vacant that I know of.<sup>2</sup> there was 160 acres of land sold for 625 dollars this summer in 3 miles of us, 30 acres of timber on it and a creek running through it. Now we want you to be sure and come to Minn. and Miner Pate. we want good church members, good citizens, and good Hoosiers in Minnesota Tell all who are such, there are plenty of room in this state. Be sure and come to Faribault County, I have travelled through Fil[1]more, Olmstead, Steel[e], Dodge, Rice, La Leusure [*Le Sueur*], Blue Earth, Martain [*Martin*], Freeborn, Goodhue and Faribault counties, in all I have travelled about 700 miles in Minn. and Faribault county beats all for me including Waseca county. I would give you a way bill [if] I knew you would come. I will give you the most important points anyhow, commencing at Tarre haut Id. Paris, Bloomfilld [*Bromfield*], Bloomington, Lasalle, Dixon, Galena, Dunlieth, (Ill,) on the Mississippi River,<sup>3</sup> Dubuque (Iowa,) Decorah, (Minn.)<sup>4</sup> El[1]iota,<sup>5</sup> Preston, Rochester, Rice Lake, Owatonia [*Owatonna*] Wilton, Cobb River Post Office Spencer Armstrongs  $2\frac{3}{4}$  miles south of the P. O.<sup>6</sup> Now come along and dont wait for trifles but you and Miner move immediately to a good, healthy country. never mind freezing, I would rather winter here than Ind. I have tried both, and I have travelled

<sup>2</sup> Armstrong's farm was in the "Southeast Quarter of Section 7-104-24," Dunbar Township, Faribault County. See Faribault County Deeds, book U, p. 300, in the office of the register of deeds at Blue Earth.

<sup>3</sup> East Dubuque, Illinois, formerly was known as Dunleith.

<sup>4</sup> Decorah is in Winneshiek County, Iowa, about twenty miles south of the Minnesota boundary.

<sup>5</sup> Elliota was in Canton Township, Fillmore County, just north of the Iowa boundary.

<sup>6</sup> The route recommended by Armstrong is substantially the same as that marked today by United States Highway Number 52 from central Illinois to Rochester. He advised Shanklin to follow well-defined roads as far as Owatonna. From that point the trail to Armstrong's farm led southwest across Waseca County, into the northwest corner of Dunbar Township, Faribault County. The farm was in the third tier of sections to the south and one to the west of the section in which Cobb River was located.

over Prairie countrys enough to know a good one when I see it.  
Now Abe, write immediately and let me hear from you.

Yours respectfully as ever, (write)

SPENCER ARMSTRONG and family

to ABRAHAM SHANKLIN and family)

Please read this letter to Emily Fields.



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