

What enjoyments and pleasures this little piano must have brought to the wilderness of the fifties! The influence and culture that came with it are of great consequence, for they provided a foundation for a richer life in the West, and gave to those who came in contact with the instrument a sense of refinement and an awareness of beauty. No longer does music come from its aged strings; for time has deprived it of its soul. Silently it stands, ornamented only with candlestick and silk shawl, recalling the glories of an era far removed—a mute reminder of pioneer music in the Northwest.

WILLIS H. MILLER

HUDSON, WISCONSIN

PIONEERING IN STEARNS COUNTY

THE WRITER OF THE FOLLOWING LETTERS, Albert E. Bugbie, settled in Stearns County in 1867 as a youth of eighteen. He acquired a farm at Paynesville, which was organized as a township in the year of his arrival. To George B. Greene, a friend living at his old home at Belchertown, Massachusetts, Bugbie sent the reports of life on the Minnesota frontier that appear herewith. Although he was enthusiastic about his new home, he pictured both its drawbacks and its advantages for the settler from New England. His correspondent chose to remain in Belchertown. He must, however, have found Bugbie's letters of interest, for he preserved them, and eventually they came into the possession of his daughter, Mrs. Ina Greene Gray. Recently she sent them to the writer's daughter, Mrs. R. F. Schwartz of Paynesville, through whose courtesy copies were obtained for the Minnesota Historical Society.

In publishing the letters, numerous references to people and events at Belchertown and to purely personal matters have been omitted. It should be noted that members of the family spell the name "Bugbee," though the writer of these letters preferred to spell it "Bugbie." B. L. H.

ALBERT E. BUGBIE TO GEORGE B. GREENE, September 21, 1868,
to February 19, 1875

PAYNESVILLE Sept 21st 1868

BROTHER GREENE yours of the 2nd was received last Saturday eve, was glad to hear from you once more but sorry to hear that you had hurt your hand. I run a pitchfork tine through my hand about three weeks ago & that laid me up for a week, & now I have a Boil on my left foot that has laid me up for a week. We hav'n't got through with our haying yet. have got about five ton waiting to be stacked. On account of my foot we hav'nt got it done yet. . . .

I wish you & Sheldon were out here. You certainly could do better at farming here than at the east. I have got me a farm of 170 acres, 160 prairie land & 10 woodland. The woodland is in some of best in this part of the state. The prairie is also excelent. Much better than any around turkey hill. Not hardly a dozen stones on it, excepting two knolls that are a little stoney, but are all small stone.

I wish you had been here to have eat supper with me last night. we had Roast Goose. we also had one last thursday, they are as thick around here this fall as the Crows about. Would like to have you go hunting Geese & Ducks & Deer with me some day this week. the Ducks are very thick. I have shot six or eight already.

We are going to have Venison for dinner. Shot the last of last week. I did'nt shoot it but wish I had. I hav'nt tried to shoot any yet. It's fun to shoot Geese & Ducks I can assure you.

There is a lot of "Half breeds" camped in Paynesville for the winter they live in reagular [*sic*] Indian style, & have Indians "Tepees" (huts) to live in.

I am going to have them make me a pair of Mocasins to wear this winter, they make them for a dollar a pair. . . .

I have commenced me a library, have got two books for it. "Pilgrims Progress," & Hollands poem, "Kathrina," it's a splendid poem. Have you ever read it? . . .

Hoping this will find you well I remain yours &c&c

A E BUGBIE.

PAYNESVILLE, STEARNS Co Feb. 6th (March I guess.) 1870
BRO GREENE Yours of Jan 25th came to hand by last evenings Mail.
. . . There was more news contained in that one letter than I have

heard from Belchertown befor, since you last wrote me. . . . We are all as well as usual I believe. I [*sic*] fellow can't afford to be sick out here in this country during this season, for the money is so awful scarce. I havn't seen but about ten \$ in cash during the whole of the winter thus far. Still I have worked steadey all winter at paying my old debts. I have been at work getting out timbers and plank for a Bridge, but got through last night. I got only \$1⁵⁰ per day for myself and team & board ourselves out of it. Times are the hardest here this winter that I ever saw them. Before this winter, money was about as plenty and wages about as good as they were formaly in Mass. The first twelves months that I was here I earnt \$240.00 working by the month. out of that sum I saved \$200.00 & payed it twords getting me a farm. it cost me only forty dollars for clothes boot & shoes & spending money during the year. I could'nt have saved near as much out of that amount in Mass. for it would have cost me a great deal more for spending money thare than here. Last year I don't think I cleared quite so much as the year before, although I farmed on my own hook. I should have cleared more if Wheat had kept up at the same price last fall as it was the winter before. Wheat then was worth \$1.00. per bush. now it is only worth .50 per bush. if I could have got one dollar for my wheat the same as the farmers did the season before I should [have] cleared all of \$300. but as it was I guess that I shall clear about \$175. before the first of April. Next summer I intend to put in about 50 Acres of Wheat which will yeald me about 1,500 buysels [*sic*], that is if it is any kind of a season. that will bring me, what I shall have to sell out of it, counting it at one dollar per bush. \$1400, & the cost of raising will be about half. Still it may not be worth over fifty cents and perchance not worth that much. Still I am fully convinced even during this tight pinch, that a young man can make more money in a year, & live upon less than half, that he could in the East. to be sure things are not quite as convenient and comfortable here as they are in the east, but every year brings us nearer and neare[r] to the manners and customes of the East

We have had a pretty good supply of snow here this winter. in the woods, it is about straddle deep on a man. Althoug[h] we have had considerable snow still I think that the weather has been more mild than it was during the other two winters that I put in in Minn previous to this. The coldest weather we have had thus far has

been only thirty six degrees below zero. We have had, since I have been [here], some desperate cold, weather, fifty degrees below being about the coldest. . . .

your brother

A E BUGBIE.

MINNESOTA PINERIES, July 15th 1871

BRO GREENE . . . You will see by this that I am not at Paynesville this summer as usual, but am a long ways from there. I am in the woods about thirty miles from any persons besides our crew which consists of ten fellows, and about as jolly a crew of lazy men as can very often be found. About thirty miles from here is an old U S. agency or Indian trading post, and about five miles from there is our post Office. and there is only three white men living there, A Post master, store keeper & Saloon Keeper. the rest are all Indians and half Breeds, and they are a darn'd sight worse than the Indians, about half white and the othe[r] half Indian. I came in here about the first of May with three other fellows from Paynesville, & calculate to stay here till about the first of December. We are getting \$42. per month, & that is considered pretty good pay for this country.

I put in about sixty acres of Wheat, Oats and Barley before I came in here & then hired a man to harvest and thrash it for me. that will probably cost me about \$150, & the crop will bring me at the least \$400. So if every thing goes on as I am in hopes it will I shall mak[e] \$500. from the first of April, till the first of December. I was down to Paynesville to spend the fourth, & stayed six dayes [*sic*], & I had become so much Indianised during the two months that I had been here that scarcely any one knew me. When I come out of the woods this fall I will send you a likeness of your humble servant to let you see how bad a man can get to looking by living amongst the Indians. . . .

. . . Now you answer this to me as soon as you get it & let me know how all are getting along and oblige one of your oldest & truest of friends who goes by the name of

A E BUGBIE

PAYNESVILLE Nov 3rd 1872.

BRO GREENE How are you getting along now days, & what are you about. Are you going to teach School again this winter.

I have taken a school for five months, to commence next Wednesday morning. the same School that I taught last summer and winter. By the way, how are Politics in your part of the country. Out here that is the whole sum and substance of the conversation now days. Its nothing but Grant & Greely & Greely & Grant all the time. Suppose that day after tomorrow will decide which of those illustrious Gentlemen will rule our great and glorious community for the next four years. Which of them stands the best show in Mass. and which of them are you voting for. Greely does not stand much of a Show in our immediate community. But through out our county will probably get a good many votes, as there are a large number of Catholic Germans through the county. . . .

Rosie says thank you for the flower seeds that you sent her & says if you have any new varieties send some of them along. She had a splendid assortment of flowers this summer. as great a variety as I ever saw in one garden.

I tell you this country can not be beat for such things, if one has a mind to take an interest in them. And you know she is a great hand for such things.

The young men of our town have just been getting up a Brass Band your humble servant among the rest. I commenced with playing the Snare Drum, but have exchanged it for one of the instruments. And am learning another fellow to play the Drum. Our Base Ball club has done but poorly this summer as three or four of our best players have been gone nearly all summer.

Business is just commencing to be lively, expect it will be a great deal more so after election. Wheat is rather on the decline now, is only worth from Seventy (70) to Seventy five (75), per bushel. it was worth a dollar, a month ago. Corn & Oats are so plenty that there is scarcely any market for them. Oats are worth from 10 to 20 cts a bushel. My partner bought a hundred bushels a few days [ago] for eleven dollars & sixty cts, (\$11.60) Corn will not sell at all on the cob. Shell corn from 15 to 25.

How is the Apple crop with you this fall? I believe they are

worth from four to six dollars a barrel. Think if they get any lower than four dollars I shall buy a few barrells.

Now write me just as soon as you get this and all the news that you can think of. And oblige your old friend

A E BUGBIE

PAYNESVILLE MINN Feb 19th 1875

BRO GREENE, your ever welcome and long looked for letter came to hand by last evenings mail. found us quite well. Much better than one could really expect considering what an enormous long spell of cold weather we have had. Ever since Christmas it has been between twenty five and fourty degrees below zero, and some of the time, was down to forty five degrees below. Every one say[s], it has been the coldest weather they ever knew. Have not had very many Severe Snow Storms as yet and I don't anticipate a very great many more between this and spring. As you said, I did not intend the first of the winter to teach, and refused three good chances. was not out of my fall term till the twenty first of November. But business generally was getting rather dull so I concluded I would teach a few months. So am now teaching a three months school, have three weeks after this week. Business ever[y]where through out the western country is dreadful dull this winter, and large number[s] of mercantile houses are going by the board. A H Wilder & co of St Paul is one very heavy wholesale concern that has gone up this winter. Also D M Russell of St Cloud is another. These heavy failures are affecting the mass of people more than one would naturally suppose they would. Making money matters rather tight. I never knew money to be quite as scarce as at present, since I came to Minn. A man with a few thousands to let could do a big thing this way just now. could get almost any interest he was a mind to ask.

This has been rather a hard winter thus far on cattle, especially young cattle. A great many throughout the State are dieing. I have only lost one head as yet. hope I shall not lose any more. The past twenty four hours has been the warmest we have had since the severe cold weather began. . . .

Next Monday eve there is to be a grand celebration in honor of the birth of George Washington, At Paynesville, County of Stearns and State of Minnesota, and the Paynesville Cornet Band is to open the

entertainment One of the members of Said Band, is the Honorable A E Bugbee esq^r. He plays the B flat Cornet. I have been trying everything during the past few years that I could think of to make money, even to Town Clerking. Have been town Clerk for two years, is no very great paying office, yet you know that every little helps. . . .

. . . What is grain worth with you this winter? Oats with us are worth, at present, .50 cts per bushel. Corn on ears, .30. Shelled .70. Wheat is almost a drug, is only fetching now .65. And that is the reason that Money matters are so tight. it ought at the least calculations, be bringing from \$1.00, to \$1.10 then there would be a great deal larger quantity on the markt and money would consequently be more plenty. For Barley there is scarcely none to be sold. what there is, is bringing a good sound price. So much so that next year every one will go to raising it and then it will not be worth any price at all. Rye has no markt whatever. As there is none raised to sell. Only a small quantity raised, and that is all consumed at home. Potatoes have all frozen up tighter than Davies Locker, so I guess they will bring a round price in the Spring. Mine are all frozen, but thank the kind stars I only had about 15 bushels just enough to last our selves, through, and now I am thinking we shall have to go without or else eat them frozen.

Do you do any hunting late years? if you want some good hunting, just come out here next fall about the first of September and stay till New Years and I will warrant that you will find hunting the likes of which you [n]ever saw before in your life. I am prepared for a good hunt next fall, have just bought me a splendid double barrel shot gun that is warranted to kill every time no matter how far off the game is that I am Shooting at. Even if it is as far off as you are. I believe I could hit your old Rooster from my South East Door. Any way you hold him out some fine morning and I will give him a trial. Well I guess I have written about as much nonsencial [*sic*] Stuff as you will care to answer, so I will close with many kind regard from all to all.

Your's truly
A E BUGBIE



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