

In camp near Fort Smith Arkansas
April 27th 1849

Miss. Fagermeather & Pierrepont
Gent.

My letter you will see is dated at a point on the outskirts of society & you will know from this that I am about to launch upon the shoalest sea of woods & prairies that lies beyond. I have nothing of moment to say to you nor has any thing occurred to me of sufficient novelty to be worthy of record but the prospect of my long & hazardous journey through an entire wilderness has produced a feeling of loneliness which I have thought to dissipate a little by exercising the privilege of returning in thought to my friends behind. On our journey we found the cholera very prevalent on the river but we cut through the swamp without receiving any injury & arrived here two weeks ago last Monday, since which time we have lived altogether in the "tented field". We sleep on the ground with two blankets to protect us from the moisture & cold above & below both of which have been abundant, though the days have now become very hot. Our food consists of salt bacon, pork & hard bread with occasionally rice & beans all taken in the open air either standing or sitting on the ground or such substitutes for chairs as we can find in the boxes & barrels scattered about the camp. All squeamishness

about the manners & civilities of the table is of course out of place when the table is only the head of a band & thirty men from all ranks in society are helping themselves with their own knives & forks from a common dish. The first meal tried my nerves & my appetite about equally & I am now surprised at the eagerness with which I rush up, at the call, to "feed" in a manner that was then so repugnant. There is less of substantial difference than even I, though of so philosophic a temperament, had supposed there was in the various qualities of food or the manner of taking it. But we have troubles that are real, because a mule is a reality though he be neither horn nor jackass.

When we reached here we found our committee had purchased 40 wild Mexican mules a little larger than a Newfoundland dog because the money they had would not buy others & in consequence we have had to get fifteen more & have been detained here nearly three weeks catching & harnessing them, they continuing to escape nearly as fast as we get them & costing us more trouble than they are worth when they are caught. Yesterday we loaded up & proceeded five miles in the course of which we upset one waggon & smashed another, & to day are trying to repair damages. Tomorrow or Monday we shall proceed, our train consisting of nine waggons with six mules each & one waggon with two yoke of oxen with a half dozen horses & 40 mules. The roads for 150 miles we learn are very bad instead of being smooth prairie as we had supposed all which makes our immediate prospects

so discouraging that we all regret that we came by
this route. Several companies have dissolved & the
members returned home while others are floundering
on through the mud. We had anticipated something
like a romantic excursion on the prairies & mountains
enjoying the sports of the chase & admiring the changes
of scenery, but we now see that we are not to go as
"passengers" regulating our own movements but as
emigrants working our way with daily labour that
~~will~~ will consume all our time & oppress us with fatigue.
In fact it is the labour without ceasing that keeps us cheerful
by depriving us of the opportunity for reflection & regrets.

My former occupations are so entirely driven from
memory by present engagements that I can hardly
realise that I was once a "practising attorney" in New York
& I am thus fortunately relieved from any anxiety about
my business. Nevertheless I hope no client of mine will
suffer from this oblivion & am sure they will not so
far as it can be prevented by your kind attention to
my interests.

I was just interrupted by the cry of a "mule loose" and
"all hands" have been logging it on the prairie in an effort
to captivate the creature, luckily successful, which has not
always been the case, we having lost two.

I have written this on the top of my hat sitting tailor fashion
on the ground sometimes in the shade but just now in the sun
& is a mode too inconvenient to prolong. I hope you will
write to me in about one month & again in about two months

directed to San Francisco where both letters will probably
arrive long before I shall.

Yours truly

John Finck

Edmund Norton

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May 25/49
E. Norton