



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

1887-04-14

Letter from W. H. Trout to John Muir, 1887 Apr 14.

William H. Trout

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Recommended Citation

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552 Greenbush St Milwaukee Wis.

April 14th
1887

John Muir Esq
Martinez
Contra Costa Co California

Dear Friend John

Through Mr Sanderson of Detroit and Mrs George Lindsay of this city I have been cheered by hearing quite directly from you. I heard first, that you wished me to write you, and afterwards, that you were going to write me; but since I am not receiving anything I shall take the initiative

Let me first thank you for that kindest sort of a kind remembrance that proposes a plan to help me and enables me to help myself and for the present I will waive a vast number of other matters that might be taken about and will discuss this business

If I recollect aright, you wished me to go to your country, and with your help, design and build, or get built, machinery and a shop or mill, for the manufacture of fruit boxes. You furnishing the capital and to turn the thing over me on terms advantageous to both and I to run the business. This is briefly as I understood Mr Sandersons statement. Such an offer or anything near it, I regard as an extraordinary opportunity. The great question with me is to avail myself of it. I suppose the business is there now waiting some one to take it up in good shape and the probability is if we do not some others will, and if a firm with large means get hold of it they will supply the demand and work themselves into a monopoly of the whole. I do not say that we would not if we could; but I think it may be in such shape that a moderate outlay in good time might be able to hold a respectable share of business against all comers; so that it might be necessary to begin right off. In that case I might have a hard job to get at it. I should like to have time to shape things for so big a journey with such a family as I have

Last Feb 15th was the completion of my 53^d year: I am not regarded by any means old for that age but the work I am engaged in in many respects unsuitable for age. Drawing taxes the sight heavily and requires that smooth action of the muscles that is more the peculiarity of young life. The slow but steady change in my sight warns me that I may be obliged to lay by from drawing when I might yet be quite serviceable in some other way if I would be only nicely started in it; but to change near the end of one's term is not desirable. So I have been for some time on the look out for something of this sort.

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Again I have two boys the eldest 13 the younger nearly 10 years hearty fellows that will soon spoil for want of active employment

There are 4 girls the eldest nearly 12 and the youngest over 3 years. Now something like this would be immense for the boys and if opportunities for education are good might be also better for the girls

In regard to California it will surely be a wonderful country if it has not some drawbacks but at any rate judging from the southwestern movement the good points must far exceed the bad or people are led to think so at least

The price of land is going skyward but that is quite a natural course for the day it is the climate they are selling but I suppose a poor fellow can get considerable climate from even a small piece of ground which will be lucky for me

The biggest joke for me will be for me to get there. My better half thinks she already far enough from her base and 2000 miles to the south west is not to be entertained.

We have a little congregation of Disciples here it was started about 2 1/2 years ago and till lately has been fighting for life; Now it is just beginning to show that it is one of the powers for good and you know me well enough to judge where I would be in it

Not the most prominent nor by any means the least active. The piece of them who have heard of your proposition say Oh you wont go away and leave us now. You must stay for a good while yet. Well I wont like to go you may be sure but their very fears indicate the probable course

I have said about enough you have an idea how I feel about the whole business. A little nearer nature would please me very much. I spent 3 weeks in Oct 1883 on the prairies of Manitoba after a nearly 3 months term of millbuilding at Winnipeg. It was about as enjoyable a time as I most ever spent. The extra physical vigor it gave was surprising. I was then for a while the proud owner of a half section of land

I saw Dan Dr Muir I mean he was up to Portage and before returning sent word he would call on me. I was obliged just at that time to Chicago on some little business for our firm so he accompanied me as far as Racine. It gave us only a short chat but we did our best for the time.

You will of course write as soon as convenient giving me a pretty full idea of the business undertaking and the general condition of things. Facts and figures pro and con are the main stay in business and mechanics as well. You know all this better than I do. I alone will be responsible for the course I take. I wont say John Muir advised me

I suppose your place is in the southern part where rain is scanty and a scientific system of irrigation is resorted to. You tap the mountains that tap the clouds and get rain without thunderstorms or Hurricanes

I dont understand where your timber is to come from in
such a country as that but the letter will explain
All of our folks are well except James & Alexander
and a daughter of Charlie Gays all three are badly
affected with Brights disease Joe White Law
Maggies husband died this winter Mary died nearly
4 years ago Charlie is again married

I am placing the address on this letter from memory
hope it will reach you all right yours &c
W. H. Trout

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