

P4
Address 40
Capt Stansbury

F. R. GRIST TO MRS. REUBEN KNOX. (4)

Langdon + Gunner
same?

P 3+4
Drawings

In Camp at Fort Laramie, Platte R.,
July 14, 1849.

Dear Mother:

Tremont's reports
P4.

Buffalo
him
mule
post

It seems but yesterday that I wrote you last, yet 380 miles of prairie and 3 long weeks have passed since then. My mind has been too much occupied and my feelings too much tried to take note of time or distance. As Langdon, who by the way makes common cause with me, says, "I have been going through the mill", and I trust that the ordeal is nearly past. It makes my head ache and my blood boil now to recall the long series of oppression - concealed enmity - and covert insult to which I have been subjected. Fortunately I had spirit enough to stand up for my rights in the first place and since - so that now I am just where I started. I have said nothing - not a word on the subject has passed but the little that I have hinted was short and to the purpose - so that although the Capt and myself are tacit and bitter enemies - no man ever treated me with more scrupulous politeness. I hate him with as cordial hatred as I can command and I despise him more. I believe he reciprocates the feeling so I am comparatively content and easy. He is about the only man I ever met to whom I feel under no sort of obligation. I have never seen any favorable point about him and his good or bad opinion I throw to the dogs - so the matter is settled for me. I might go on to characterize him, but it will only take up time and space. My mind is made up. I have thought fifty times of leaving the party and have been near doing it, but the Lieut. as my constant friend, is so kind and advises me so constantly and urgently to remain that I shall do so - for my own purposes and to serve my own interests. I have been learning a hard lesson in human nature, my dear Mother, and I wish that it did me more good. One thing I have learned; to take care of myself and to trust in my own resources. In future I shall try to see what I can do by persevering in my own purposes. So I say again, don't be anxious about me. I am

in every sense of the work ALONE here, but I rather like it. It unfetters me and leaves me more to myself and that I like - besides it relieves me from the necessity of extra ?. Kind offices take up time and here I have to reciprocate very few of them. I should have to take care of myself in any case and now I have to do so no more, so on all accounts it is perhaps better as it is.

Our ^{road}rode since I last wrote you has been much less interesting and picturesque - one long monotonous march over a barren sandy plain. "The Plains" - unbroken by aught save here and there a lonely grave or a prairie dogs village. The Platte always at our right hand spreading its broad ^{sheet} ? between ^{low}low and level banks covered to the water's edge by the same scanty stunted grass. We eased our way successively through all the great game ranges. The Antelope from the Blue? River to the Forks of the Platte - then for three days the great buffalo ? And then till now our table has been supplied with Elk meat. Among the mountains they say we shall find little but the mountain sheep and Big-horn and a few deer. I believe I told you that I had exchanged my horse for a mule - a very good mule in her way, but not exactly the animal for running buffalo. By the way, my horse went lame and I was enough ask the Capt to order some one to dress his sprain. He told me very coolly that he knew that the guide would be glad to give me his mule in exchange for my horse, and curse him, that's the way I came to mount the donkey - (one out of a thousand). I went out one morning at the Forks to see the guide run buffalo, and while I was looking intently a great lumbering bull got separated from the herd and came loping by within fifty yards of me. It was too much. I grew excited; a dash of the spurs communicated the fact to my steed and stimulated her to flap her ears and switch her tail in sympathy and not in approval. However I continued the application and in the course of a few minutes we were under way. I had let the hunter have

my gun and had only my holster pistols. I dried one out, removed the cap and used it industriously in the same good cause in which my spurs were engaged. The bull was wounded and by almost superhuman ~~effort~~ ^{neared} we ~~wounded~~ ^{neared} him. I saw his eyes rolling and his ~~mouth~~ ^r and grew more excited. By this time the chase had lasted nearly a mile. I was within fifteen yards of him and prepared to fire, but he sheered so as to throw me behind him. ~~Again~~ Again I applied the pistol and again. ~~Neared~~ Neared him, but my mule was tired of running and was going to stop. I knew what was coming and prepared. ~~Again~~ Again I was about to ~~shoot~~ fire, when down we went, rolling over 2 yards over her head. The chase was up. I sprang up and gave the brute a jerk and she got up as cool as a cucumber - as she would say "any body hurt - all an accident done a purpose". So ended my first and last buffalo hunt.

I've been among the Indians. I've sat in their lodges. I've smoked the pipe with them and travelled with them. We fell in last week with a Sioux village of 3 or 4 hundred, camped with them over night and we all broke up and moved together in the morning. I jogged along all the morning with a keen-eyed weather beaten old fellow who to judge from the number of his horses and the profusion of ornament about his dress was a person of some importance in the tribe. We kept up a lively conversation in signs while most likely neither party had more than a very faint notion of what the other was talking about. He first offered to swap for my mule then for my pistols and then for my saddle blanket and neckerchief. At noon they pitched their lodges again to stay as long as the grass lasted and we have not seen them since. With them I found the two traders Bissonet and Bordeaux whom I met in the steamboat and who offered me their escort out. I tried to procure a robe and mocassins but the emigrants have swept everything.

I have made some drawings - enough to serve the expedition, but not as I wished to have done; partly because camp duties have occupied me so

constantly, but principally because I really have not had the heart for anything of the kind. I shall try and not allow myself to get into such moods again. Mr. Gunnison admires my drawings but the Capt. hemms and haws and talks about the camera and the Daguerrotype. That touched me at first but I must try to get over it. Heaven knows they are bad enough, but he knows nothing about it and speaks I honestly believe from petty spite and from a besotted? admiration ~~for~~ of the engravings in Fremont's reports - which are miserable. I never say so however, and let him think what he pleases.

Have you heard anything from Grandma, Cousin Laura, or from Carolina? Tell me all that would interest me. Perhaps you have letters there for me, so start them with long ones of your own. We now leave the last post where there is an express and not a word have I heard. Six long winter months in the mountains are before me, during which I can do nothing out of quarters, and we shall winter in camp away from all habitations. It now appears that there can be no operation till spring and we shall not get back short of eighteen months - perhaps two years. You have the address. I will copy it again:

Care of Capt. H. Stensbury,
Topl Engrs.
Salt Lake, Fort Kearney via Linden,
Atchison Co., Mo.

And now, my dear Mother, I have to beg an important kindness of you - that you will immediately sit down and write me a long letter, direct it as herein set down and pack it off at random. My love to the boys and to Joe. Perhaps I may get time before we are off to send him a letter. Will try. Tell Pa that a ~~lax~~ little care at Fort Leavenworth set my outfit all right and that low spirits made me view the matter worse than it really was and beg his pardon for any anxiety I may have caused him on that head. My clothing is short for the winter but leather will supply that. Kiss little Betty for me and jog her little memory now and

then or I shall be forgotten. And a long good bye to you all. With fresh resolution I take my stand against blue devils of every sort. A blast of the pure air from the far blue mountains before us wafts such annoyances with the mosquitoes and sand flies down to their native holes, and as I inhale it, makes me strong - ~~firm~~ ~~strong~~ free spirited, independent - *boycout* as itself. Silent contempt and quiet determination will do much and after I close this letter I shall shut myself up like an oyster in his shell, play bear and suck my paws for company and talk to my own thoughts. For forty miles has a giant mountain loomed before us - Laramie peak and the black hills and they seem no nearer. They are now fifty miles from us, and then commence the Rocky Mountains which will shortly enclose us. We are 7 or 800 miles from our destination. Expect to reach it about the first of September, - more probably the 10th or 12th, and 300? miles from the South Pass.

Good bye - don't be afraid if my writing be very slow.

Your son,

F. R. GRIST.