

Huntsville, Walker County, Texas
January 25th, 1858

My dear friends and relations,

I have long promised myself the pleasure of holding converse with you by letter. One circumstance or another has prevented, again I thought you would be in the regular receipt of one of our state papers, which I had I had omitted putting your name on their list. I sent you on the 12th December last the "Texas Almanac" for 1858 which contains general information which I hoped has come to hand. If not, let me know and I will send you another copy by the postal mail. I send you a copy of "Penitentiary Report" with which I am still connected, though may soon leave it and move to the Houston city. My mother still enjoys her usual health though feeble, as one of her years must necessarily be. She is more than well satisfied and pleased with her change. Making at times she could wake up in the morning and find herself among you all, extend the courtesies of the New Year, and find herself back again. To you all and family she desires to be affectionably remembered.

My family is all well and living with me except Helen & Louisa who are married and living, one with ten, the other twenty four miles from here. They and families are well. The former has one, the latter four children. Helen had been sick but now convalescent.

We have no news generally speaking. Times rather hard and money thinly settled, though no reasonable cause for it. This you know is a great cotton country. While other cotton growing states have short crops last year, ours has been abundant, heavier than any preceeding one. Again the Planter is well paid for the culture of that staple if he can net 8 cents per lb for it. The market opened at 15 cents which would net him (all costs and charges off) 12 cents, but they anticipated a rise in the article, and little was sold. But instead of a rise, it fell, and at this time home sales would only net him the 8 cents. This, although good pay for their labor, they refuse to take. The consequence is no money in the country and hard times the result. Again, in our section of country, we have had abundant corn crops which pay the farmer well at fifty cents per bushel. Yet on account of short crops in other sections of the country, they were unwilling to take less than seventy-five cents per bushel, and some ask one dollar. But so it is the world over. None are satisfied with the present. Hope points to a more brilliant or profitable future. Pork has been selling from 6 to 8 cents per hundred pounds. Winter cows at \$20, and so on through the general wants of the human family. Flour at Galveston \$6 – here about \$8 per bbl. This we do not consider high. Take things all in all the citizens of our state I feel are highly favored over some of the other states. Having no Banks in our state, we have not suffered from the late convulsions east and west, only incidentally as all must in a confederacy united as ours is.

So far geographically speaking, of the productions of the soil and financial. But were I to hazard an opinion politically it would be that gloom, darkness and danger is hanging over the most glorious union. I trust I may be a false prophet.

When I hazard the opinion, that unless a more commonsense view is taken upon the subject of one of our peculiar institutions (I mean slavery) by the public men living where it does not exist and suffer each state to enjoy in peace what the laws and constitutions recognize as property, this union of ours will cease to exist. Common sense should cause the politicians of the great manufacturing states to ask themselves, what can we do without that great southern staple, cotton? How and by what character of labor is it produced? The answer would be, it is our heart's blood. Without it, grass would grow in our streets, our operations would be thrown out of employ, and found wandering without home, food or raiments. This is bound to be the result in the event of such a separation. A southern confederacy once formed would ship direct to Europe and confiscate every bale of cotton found bound for the northern market, and they would be compelled to seek their supplies from the other side of the Atlantic. This state of affairs I hope may never exist, but it most assuredly will unless the abolitionists of the free states do not change the course of conduct of that great issue. I am no croaker, born in a free state, living in slave state, occupying no political position, seeking none. But a calm look on passing events, the foregone conclusions save unwillingly be forced upon me.

But excuse my political thesis. When I sat down to write, I was on family affairs, not politics. May you be the recipient of many pleasant Christmas' and New Year's.

Yours affectionately,
John S. Besser

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Huntsville, Walker County, Texas  
February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1867

Dear Caroline,

Your welcome letter of 6th ult. came to hand a few days since, having been forwarded from Houston. It is always a source of satisfaction to me to hear from you. It recalls to mind many pleasant reminiscences, though mingled with melancholy reflections. If there even lived one individual for whom my best heart's affections reverts back to with love and veneration, it is for that dear old father of yours, where care and kindness came to me, can never be erased from the tablets of my memory. And I had once thought it would be in my power to render some feeble return to those of his own blood he has left behind him. But if I am unable, I yet have the consolation and satisfaction to know that they are all so situated as not to be dependent on the cold charity of an unfeeling world. I regretted to hear of the sick of your self, Mr. Lowe, and the children, but pleased to hear that all your lives have been spared, and restored to health. I cannot but think much as we may dislike to leave old homesteads and the associations connected with them that you may be better pleased with your present locality, though I have but an indistinct recollection of that part of the country. There was "Turners" who lived in Lincoln county, my wife "says she did not know any by the name of Levi." In your letter I suppose you are almost a Grandmother. I was glad to hear from Edward. I sent him and Mr. Lowe several papers during the last year directed to Fielding P.O. and did expect to hear from him. But I suppose his baby boy and wife engrossed all his attention. I lately had a copy of our "Texas Almanac" for 1867 sent by Express to Mr. Lowe, I thought it the safest mode although there may be some charges on it. I sent it with some more for other persons to the care of Captain Hubbard in St Louis with instructions to him to hand it to Mr. Ashbrook. But as he has left St. Louis, the Capt. may not see him. It might be well for you to write to the Captain and give him some other instructions. I think Mr. Lowe and yourself may read it with pleasure and probably find much Historical and Statistical information. We have a fine Album and you must not fail to send me the Photographs of your entire family. They would be to me precious mementoes. The health of our family is and has been good. Providence has been kind to us. Our lives spared and blessed with health and all needed comforts for which I feel very thankful to the Giver of all good who doeth all things well. For "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right." My mother is living with us, and is in her usual good health though afflicted to some extent the last year with something like Erysipilis. We had a very mild winter. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, we had a slight fall of snow though not enough to cover the ground followed by about a week of what we call "weather suitable to save meat." About our family, my son James has never married, all the balance are. The last one "a daughter" and the youngest, was married over a year. I have 13 grandchildren, Helen 4, Louisa 3, Eliza 3, Charles 3. Charles has lost one. They are all living within a few miles of us.

We have not, nor can we recover soon from the evils of the last war, but our State in comparison with other Southern States suffered but little. No armies raiding through the state wantonly, burning and destroying everything they could lay their hands on. As to the future, no man can tell what it may bring forth. For me, I have no Politics, care nothing about voting, or whether our State ever has any representation in Congress. Should Congress ever grant us any favor or recognize that we have rights, I shall consider it an act of Grace on their part. With my love and kind regards to you and Mr. Lowe and your dear children, in which my wife desires to join, I am truly and sincerely,

Your more than kinsman,  
John S. Besser

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Huntsville, Texas, Aug. 22, 1868

Dear Caroline,

Your very welcome letter of 11th ult. came to hand and as all such ever are was pensed with pleasure. This is a time when a line from an old valued friend shed some light and joy into me heart, which has almost closed up its avenues to such feelings. Since the loss of my last companion, I have indeed felt that the world was a blank to me. She had been to me the joy and comfort of my old age, her equals may have been her superiors, never. During the period she was spared to me, it was but a foretaste of heaven, too much happiness for mortals to enjoy long without alloy. God in his wisdom seems fit to remove her to a higher and nobler field of enjoyment. She is now in the presence of her Redeemer God, in whom she delighted and trusted when on earth. She is now gone to realize the truth of the Christian dependence. God in his goodness and love has taken her to himself and I feel that it has been done for my good. Still it is hard for us in the flesh to submit to these bereavements with unrepining submission, as me of right should.

I know the blow has been visited on me to wean me from all earthly affections, cutting loose all worldly ties and to cause me to fix more completely my affections on heaven. For where our treasures are, there will our hearts be also.

God's mercies and goodness has been very great towards me. I still in possession of reasonable health (since 13th past in my 67th year,) my children all living within 30 miles of me and doing well. All married but one and he my oldest son that is alive and now near 39 years of age. I have 15 grandchildren living. My family consists of my mother who will be 88 years old should she live to see the 1st November next, a daughter of my second wife, and the youngest son of my last wife aged 14 years. This, with servants, makes my family. I have a very pleasant residence within the corporate limits of our town containing about 9 acres well improved with shrubbery, some 70 peach and 4 bearing apple trees. But alas, had it been God's will, I could have surrendered all to have been permitted to retain my loved wife. The result of the war caused me a heavy loss, some 30 to 40,000 dollars which was but a feather to my loss of her who had indeed brought sunshine and happiness to my heart. But God's will be done. He doeth all things well.

I rec'd a letter from Edward of May16, 1862, which I answered. He sent me his and his wife's photographs. Yours of January 6th, 1867, I rec'd and answered in February, 1867. Yours of Octo. 10/67 was rec'd during the height of our troubles and was not answered. But in February, 1868, I sent Mr. Lowe our Texas Almanac which as you do not remember, I fear did not come to hand.

I can assure you, dear Caroline, that you nor yours are ever forgotten though we may never meet on Earth. Set as so live and act our part here, that through the Grace of God, we may all meet around his Throne in Heaven at the marriage Supper of the Lamb.

I had once thought that I would have been able to evidence in a feeble manner my gratitude to your dear father, for his good to me in my early life by leaving to his some worldly memento of that love I have ever cherished to his memory, but that has been prevented by the loss of my property. The inclination has to take the place of the act.

Do let me hear from you when ever concerning, I would be more than gratified had I all of your Photographs to place as mementos in my Album which now contains 100 and in which I have several of my old Missouri friends, Capt. Hubbard among them.

I handed your letter to mother to read when she saw what you said about Eugene and Austin. She said "God bless them, they were always good boys." Her health is good, but confined part of her time by rheumatic affliction of her limbs and her eyesight is quite defective that she can but read a letter a little at a time. Give my love to Mr. Lowe, Edward and balance of your family. May you long be spared to each other.

God bless you,
John S. Besser

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Huntsville, April 24, 1869

My dear friends:

Your welcome favor of Feb. 16<sup>th</sup> as well of Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>, 1868, both came to hand. Your former one was not replied to, as I wished to have the desired photograph ready to send you. In the meantime, our annual "almanac" came out, of which I sent you a copy. Pleased to hear it came to hand and contained anything of interest. Then your letter of Feby reached me – still no photograph. I am send you one of my late wife's taken in March from a copy I have. I have none of mine. I have endeavored to get my mother to sit for hers, but she would never consent. She is still spared to us though very feeble. Her general health and appetite is good, but for the last four or five months had been confined to her room and indeed to her bed by extreme and at times excruciating pains in her back, hips, and lower limbs. Without power to change her posture without aid, and then with intense pain, this to one, as you are aware, of active life and quick movements, as hers has been, is sorely trying to her. Since Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> of last year, she has passed into her 89<sup>th</sup> year. But she is in good hands spiritually as well as temporally. She has her treasures laid up "where moths do not corrupt or thieves break through and steal." In her temporal sufferings, she feels an anxious desire to part and be with him in whom she has so long placed her trust. Situated as I was, I could not give her that care and attention she so much requires, with a full knowledge of that and my extreme lonely and desolate condition.

Old as I was (in my 67<sup>th</sup> year) I felt bound to look around me for another suitable companion and I have found one. I have known her since 1853. She was living in Houston and lost her husband there in 1867 during the prevalence of the epidemic there. Her maiden name was Seymour, born in Hartford, Connecticut, but raised in New York City. If there is anything in good blood, it will not make her any the worse by standing in the relation of second cousin of Governors Seymour of Connecticut and New York, they and her father being cousins. But this neither adds to, or detracts from the innate worth of any one. We all stand on our own intrinsic worth. We were married in Houston on the 14<sup>th</sup> of last month and for the fourth time for each of us. She has never had any children. Neither could I at my time of life married any one who had a family of children round her. I desired a companion with whom I could in the decline of life pass on time in each others company freed from the noise and confusion incidental to a family with children.

My dear mother has known her for many years, has always spoke very well of her, and was delighted when she found out I had taken her "to wife." She is very kind and attentive to mothers every want. Indeed my mother makes her company all the time.

Tried sorely I have been in the school of affliction, but God has been very good to me far beyond any right I had to expect. My last or, rather present wife stands high in the estimation of all who know her. And it is the general expression of our good friends "That they never knew of a more suitable marriage." There is just 20 years difference in our ages. Had I her photograph I would send it. She desires to be kindly remembered to you. Says "You must include her in your circle of acquaintances, that she has heard mother say so much about you that she feels almost that you was an old acquaintance.

The photographs you speak of all came to hand and safely housed in my Album to which I would be pleased to make any addition you may send me.

Those of Mr. Lowe and yourself I think very good.

Remember kindly to Edward and wife. I have their photographs as sent.

The names you give me of old Lincoln residents are familiar to me, as these I once knew.

My late wife had a brother Milton Stone who resided in your county near Hamburg. He has died but his family still resides there. Should Mr. Lowe ever be thrown with them, he can say we are all well, also their cousins, my late wife's sons.

Let me hear from you all when convenient.

With my loving regards to Mr. Lowe, yourself and family all.

I remain truly yours,  
John S. Besser

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Huntsville, Walker Co, Texas, Dec. 11, 1870

Dear Friends,

Yours of the 24 Nov. 1869 came to hand in the course of mail. With Mr. Lowe as he was 22 years ago which when he was able to read and see, gave me much pleasure. It was received when I was confined to my bed with burns received endeavoring to save my dwelling from the flames, but without success. Everything, the buildings with their entire contents was destroyed. I was not occupying it at the time, but residing, my wife and myself, in a snug one room building I had erected for my mother within the same enclosure about fifty feet from the dwelling and with difficulty it was saved from the flames. I had removed into it about the middle of November to accommodate a friend and his family, who had been Superintendent of the Penitentiary but removed by military order, until his place near the city of Houston should be vacated, he having it rented out until ... Jany 1870. I let him occupy with all my furniture, beds, bedding &c. And in the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> December all was burned to the ground and I think had it not been for my exertions two of his daughters would have perished in the flames. The result of my injuries caused my life to be despaired some week or ten days.

The ways of Providence are mysterious and past finding out.

In a few short years, under his dispensations, I have been called upon to suffer heavy pecuniary losses, first from the result of the war, and now by fire. Five thousand dollars in gold would not make me whole. Then again, I had been valuable keep sake and mementoes, which money could not replace. Our Album with its precious contents, all gone, those from you with all the rest. Then at my time of life it comes more heavily than at an earlier period. But my Heavenly Father has blessed me with a hopeful disposition. Believing fully and implicitly in the teachings of Peter when he says "Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you."

Before the last misfortune fell on me, my aged mother was taken from me. She died on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1869, having been confined to her bed for several months, and I had removed her down to my residence, my wife done everything that could be done to make her comfortable and among her last her last words was that I must be kind to Delia for she had been so attentive to all her wants, that a daughter could not have been more so.

For the last three months I have been occupying a subordinate place at the Penitentiary where I once was the Principle. Could I have taken the "Ironclad Oath" I might have been Principle. As it is they still think my services are of some value. I am Chief Clerk, Bookkeeper and Cashier, at a salary of \$150 a month, office hours 9 to 3. My wife and my self are in reasonable health. All my children live in the vicinity. The farthest is my daughter Helen, about 15 miles, two sons about 10 mile, one daughter, same distance, one within 4 miles, and one in this town. Her husband is keeping store and doing well. So you may see I am blessed in having them all near me. Some 15 grandchildren and but one death among them, which was my oldest grand daughter, who had been married but a short time.

The crops this last year has been reasonably productive. Corn a staple and staff of life, \$1 corn per bu., sweet potatoes 50¢, cotton about 11¢ per lb. Beef \$3 on foot, pork will command 10¢ dressed, all our prices are coin. The U. S. Treasury notes is not the currency of the country.

The present political cash of our state is not as pleasant as it might be. With all that is said and published to the contrary. If we take all the Northern, Western and other Journals as evidence, there is, I believe at this day, more law and order in this state than in any other state in the Union.

A heavy immigration is coming into our state but not in this section. It is rather confined to our northern range of counties. The result is, that un-improved lands are low and of slow sale, from one to two dollars per acre. Our present Rail Road depot is 45 miles distant, though we have some prospect of having the main "Great Northern Rail Road" located through our county.

Well, spent so long a time on this beautiful Sabbath morning, I have sat down and written a long deferred letter to you, who though far distant I often think of. May Providence smile on you, and grant you the riches of his blessings and should we never again meet on Earth may we have a re-union around his Throne in Heaven is my earnest prayer for Christ's sake.

Remember me affectionately to Mr. Lowe and each individual member of your family. And let me hear from you when you can conveniently do so. Writing with me now after the labors of the day are over is more of a task than it once was. My wife and me are our own servants and none to complain of. We have abundance of water at our door, and that of the best. A wood house attached, al up in Yankee style for convenience.

Affectionately and truly yours,

John S. Besser

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Huntsville, Walker County, Texas, Nov. 29/74

Dear Caroline,

I have long since received your valued letter of August 20th and although I am still engaged in the busy scenes of "this life" yet it is no excuse for neglecting an early answer. I did indeed afford me pleasure to know, not withstanding my apparent neglect in writing, you had not forgotten me.

It is too long since I wrote you. I do not know where to begin so I shall start now. The Good Lord has been very merciful and kind to me and mine. Our lives and our health has been precious in his sight. My children and grand children (of which I now have 22) are all alive and in good health. One of my son-in-laws (Sharp Whitley) married to my daughter Louisa who was born in October 1834 was killed about one year ago by a desperado at one of the Rail Road stations. She has four children. The two older are boys able to do man's work, and she owns a place about 12 miles from here and is doing very well. My daughter Julia Helen born February 1832 with her husband Brooks is living at Willis, a town on the International and Great Northern Rail Road distant from here 28 miles, has 4 children. My two surviving sons, James born in December 1829 and Charles born in January 1839, live near their sister Louisa, about 15 miles from here. Charles is married and has 4 children. James is an old bachelor. My two youngest daughters, both born in Texas, married two brothers by the name of Cox. One lives in our town, has 4 children, her husband is merchandising. The other lives in the country within 3 miles, they have no children. So you see my children are all living near me. Which is a great comfort in my old age, which I suppose you know would be 73 next August, while you will only be 54 next February. Ten years older than my present wife who I will say just here - proven all and more than all than all that I expected - a wife indeed.

The general health of our section is good. Crops though light in our county, have been better than last year. Corn delivered is worth 75¢ coin per bushel.

Huntsville is now in connection with Saint Louis and the balance of mankind by Rail Road, from here to Saint Louis 49 hours, fare of \$37.50 currency. We are within 8 miles on the main trunk of the International and Great Northern Road which with its connections via Little Rock, Arkansas and the Iron Mountain road reaches Saint Louis.

We built a tap from our town to the main truck by private enterprise distance of 8 miles at a cost of \$113,000. Our junction depot is named "Phelps" where travelers change cars for "Huntsville." The present schedule of our time places you here at 12 o'clock so you know the route. If you wish to step down and visit us.

Our fruit trees are doing well, shrubbery is o.k. I have some 30 young apple trees which I think will bear next year. Then we have peach, pear, quince, plum and fig, and dewberries, raspberries and strawberries and grapes. If we had some of your Illinois or Missouri apples for the winter eating until ours came on, what could we want more.

When I sat down to write you, I did not expect to have occupied so much space, merely a line or two to let you know I was still the spared monument of God's mercy. But I have given you a little of something, not much. I sent you a "Texas" Almanac of 1873. None was published for 1874 or should have sent it.

Remember me kindly and affectionately to Mr. Lowe and the boys.

My wife wishes also to be remembered to you. If you know how she likes to read your letters, you would get up one for her special benefit. She says "she knows she would like you if she could only get acquainted with you.

Yours truly and sincerely,
John Slater Besser

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Mrs. Caroline S. Lowe  
Monteray P.O.  
Calhoun County  
Illinois

Huntsville, May 20, 1875

Mrs. Caroline Lowe

Dear Friend and Sister,

For such you seem to me - one so much thought of as you are by my husband seems near to me - having your photograph and hearing you spoken of so often - I feel as if we had known each other in former days and as our railroads are bringing us nearer we hope to welcome you to our home - it would indeed give us great pleasure to receive a visit from you - I do not know if it will be in our power to visit you for some time to come - My husbands health has not been so good since he was burned so badly and we have been in Straightened circumstances since our misfortune - the Lord has been very good to us - he has given us plenty to eat and wear - we keep out of debt and have a little to spare for those more needy than ourselves.

I thank you for the "Dream" you sent me it accords with my own views and experience - I have even felt happier while trying to do what I can for the comfort and happiness of those around me.

We hope your son may visit Texas this fall as anticipated - tell him he must be sure to visit Huntsville - the "Junction" which he passes is only eight miles from us.

And now farewell, with many prayers for your health and happiness.

I remain truly,  
Your friend,  
Delia C. Besser

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Huntsville, Texas, Sept 16/75

Dear Caroline,

I know acknowledge on this late date yours of April 11th with "Dreams" enclosed, which I handed to wife to acknowledge, which you will find enclosed.

To Austin you can say if he still thinks of seeing Texas this fall with a venture, that Col E. W. Taylor of Houston is a gentleman with whom he can correspond in full confidence.

Should he make the trip and go direct to Houston, it can be. By Missouri, Kansas and Texas Rail Road and Houston and Texas Central, or by the Trans Mountain, Cairo & Fulton, Texas Pacific and International and Great Northern. Either of which offices can be found in Saint Louis with their rates per car load to Houston.

On the 13th last month I was 73 years old and for the first time I had all my children with their husbands and wives and a majority of my grandchildren, which made it as you may suppose a pleasant reunion.

Providence still grants us good health and in the possession of all needed and temporal blessings for which we have every cause to be grateful.

Give my love and kind regards to Mr. Lowe and the children.

Mrs. B. desires to be remembered to you all. She says "she knows she would like you if she could but make your personal acquaintance."

Truly Yours,

John Slater Besser

P.S. You will see from the date of my wife's letter that she anticipated I would write sooner. B.

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