

ROGUE VALLEY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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Editors Note:

This month we present a story in letters from one of our members, Tom Sayre. Anne Billeter's third installment of the story of Sarah Ann (Cox) will appear in the December issue of *The Rogue Digger*.

***A SAYRE TRILOGY:
THE REVEREND EZRA, SARAH ANN, AND YOUNG EZRA***

Being a series of letters depicting traumatic events in the lives of an American Family during the years 1855 through 1869. Original letters are held by the author.

I invite the reader to engage in the saga of a young family from Saratoga County, New York, during the period 1848 to 1869 and the events, for them, which encompassed America's Civil War.

Letters passed down through family generations indicate a heartbreaking tale of a young family devastated by the death of a husband and father and the ensuing but necessary separation of the widow and her three children. Resourcefulness and strong family ties persevere as they do in any good novel and as they often do in reality. Presented here, however, is a record of what actually happened; it is not a novel.

The letters will tell the family's story. Enjoy them and you will find it hard not to put yourself in that place and time. I've purposefully refrained from any narrative during the presentation of the letters fearing that might intrude on the emotion of the story as presented. I've taken the liberty of correcting grammar and spelling in the transcriptions for ease of readability and understanding.

Thomas Wesley Sayre, August 2012

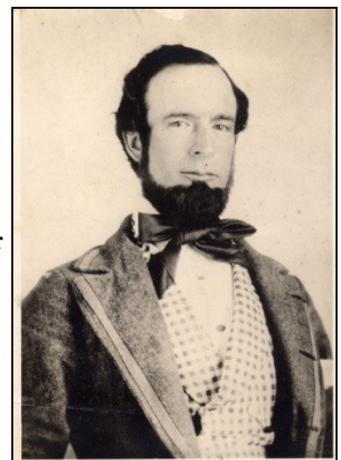
- ♦ July 6, 1855, Rev Ezra Sayre of Shelbyville, MO to a friend in Luzerne, NY:

Dear brother

Last Monday evening by letter I learned that my son John W. Sayre is dead. If so, I have not a child to close my eyes when I am dead, or see that I am decently buried.

Will you have the goodness to ascertain all the particulars of his sickness and death and write the same to me? Do not be afraid to tell me all about it.

Tell Sarah Ann that I would like to have her write to me. Tell her that if she will let me have young



Ezra, I will take him, bring him up, educate him and do by him as I would if he was my own child. I had the Consent of his father to take him when he talked of coming to Missouri with me. When I came to the country, I still expected to see him and his family here in 2 or 3 years at most, but my son is now gone.

Please give my respects to all my old friends who may think enough of me to enquire after my welfare.

Affectionately

E. Sayre

♦ September 11, 1855, Sarah Ann Sayre of Luzerne, NY to her father-in-law, Rev. Ezra Sayre:

Dear Father & Mother,

I embrace the present opportunity to let you know a little of my trouble and affliction which is great. The loss of my companion has broken me wonderfully.

I suppose you would like to know the particulars of my husband's sickness. He took a severe cold which I think was the cause of the pleurisy setting in. After being confined a short time with that, a general debility followed and he soon passed away.

While he was confined, he said several things such as I would like to see my Father. He seemed to be confident that he would get up and did not think that he was so near his end until a very short time before he died. I said to him, John, what shall I do if you should not live? He said to me, do as well as you can. He seemed to be quite calm and composed even to his last moments and thus he passed away. His last words were to prepare for yourselves.

I still live at the place with my children and you must think me very lonely and disconsolate and so I am. Time hangs heavily on me for I do not know what will become of us for I am but little prepared to bring up the Children.

I wish you were here to advise me. I want you to write me immediately and tell me what I had better do. I have no friends to advise me for my good. My hope and confidence is in your Judgment - as you think best, I will do. Some advise me one thing, and some another, and I still remain unsettled waiting to hear from you. Winter is soon coming on and for me to stay alone with the Children is truly quite an undertaking, however I hope for the best and wait patiently all my appointed time.

You spoke of taking Ezra. You say that it was his Father's wishes. That being the case, I shall not object to it. Anything to better the condition of my children will meet my approbation, although it would be hard to part from him or any of them. There has been but \$28 dollars paid on the place since you left here. I do not know how to pay and get my living. I want you to say what I had better do.



Dear Father, I must say that I have lost my best and dearest friend on earth. I hope that you will pray for me and my children- that we may be kept from temptation here and finally that we meet you and mother in a better world than this. I would be glad to see you very much.

Yours Truly in Love

Sarah Ann Sayre

♦ **September 25, 1855, Reverend Ezra to Sarah Ann:**

Mrs. Sarah Ann Sayre

Shelbyville, Shelby Co. Mo.

Dear Daughter, last night I received your letter of September 11th and hasten to answer the same. I can have no doubt of your lonesome feelings, having once been called upon to bury my wife, I felt myself alone in a world full of people.

When we left to come to this Country, I had no doubt but John would be here in two or three years at most, and I was very deeply afflicted when informed of his death. I thought -I have not a child left to close my eyes when I die, nor see that I am decently buried. I have thought if he had come out with us when we came, he might now have been alive, but these reflections cannot profit me or anybody else.

Perhaps the best thing you could do would be to sell your place- if you can do so without making too great a sacrifice -for the money and put it out at interest and live with some of your relatives there. Or if it would suit you better, sell the place and all your furniture except your beds and bedding and clothing and a few small articles and take the children and come out here and live with us in our family and you shall fare as we do.

If you think best to take the latter course, I would advise you to engage Wm. H. Wells to do the business for you if you can get him to assist, and make him whatever compensation would be right.

If you should come here, have your goods well boxed, roped and numbered and marked as follows: Rev. Ezra Sayre, Hannibal, Mo. via Chicago and Alton. And then deliver them to the agent of some forwarding company and take a regular bill of the shipment. Then, with a carpet-bag or satchel that you can carry on your arm containing your necessary wearing apparel and perhaps your silver spoons, take your children and get into the quickest train possible, come to Chicago, then to Alton and then take the Steamboat for Hannibal, Missouri. You can be at Hannibal in four days from where you live.

Write me a letter about eighteen days before you will be at Hannibal and I will meet you there with my wagon and bring you home, or if I am not there, take J. R. Gatewood's Stage for Shelbyville. The transportation of your goods from Hannibal will cost two dollars & fifty cents per hundred pounds. If you think of coming to this country this fall, come as soon as you can so that navigation does not close before your goods get here.

Write soon as possible and let me know what you will do. I will take Ezra whether you come or not, and will contrive a way to get him here. It will cost you 26 or 7 dollars fare and the children half price to come by railroad first class cars.

Your mother joins me in all this. Affectionately, Ezra Sayre

♦ February 26, 1856 Rev. Ezra to Mr. Wm. Wells of Hadley, NY:

Mr. Wm. H. Wells

Respected brother,

This is to request you, my dear brother, to interest yourself in my behalf and, if you should be coming out to Pittsfield or any other point near here, to bring or send my son's oldest boy, Ezra. Write to me and I will meet you and receive the boy and pay all expenses and charges. I have the consent of the widow that I may have the boy. He is now about five years old. We purpose to do by him as we would if he was our own child. I have now no child to close my eyes when I die, or see that I am decently buried.

Our respects to you and your family and all friends who may take the trouble to enquire after us.

In haste, your friend and brother, Ezra Sayre

♦ July 14, 1856, Rev. Ezra to Sarah Ann:

Mrs. Sarah Ann Sayre

Shelbyville, Missouri

Dear Daughter,

This will inform you that we are in health and share the common blessings of this life while we are trying to prepare for the life that is to come.

I have been for some time looking for a letter from you. If William H. Wells should be coming out here, I would be glad to have you send Ezra out by him. I will give him a good education and give him my farm when we have done with it.

I will enclose in this letter and send to you the notes which I held against John. If you can make any use of them in settling affairs, you are welcome to them.

Affectionately, Ezra Sayre

♦ March 3, 1857, Rev. Ezra to Sarah Ann:

Mrs. Sarah Ann Sayre

Shelbyville, Shelby Co. Missouri

My dear Daughter,

I have this day received your letter dated February 14th and hasten to answer the same. I hope you will certainly send young Ezra out by Mr. Wells. You may rest assured that I will do the best I can to make him a wise and good man and will fulfill all that I have promised. I would send the money for his expenses if I knew how much to send, but I will pay Mr. Wells when he gets him out here.

In reference to advising you as to the future, I do not know what to say. If I should advise you to come to this country and you should not be suited, you would perhaps blame me. I know the difficulty that a woman meets with in managing outdoor business, and feel sorry for you in your trials.

I like this country and think it a healthy country. If you had come out here when we came, you might have had double the number of acres of land you have there, and every acre worth four acres of that land for agricultural purposes. I will answer any questions you may propose in reference to this country.

Do not fail to send the boy, as we have no children of our own. I would like very much to have him. If a few dollars are necessary to fit him out, I will send it to you by letter after he gets here.

Give my respects to brother Wells, and other friends,

Affectionately

Your father Ezra Sayre

♦ May 3, 1857, Rev Ezra Sayre to Sarah Ann:

Mrs. Sarah Ann Sayre,

Shelbyville, Shelby County, Mo.

Dear Daughter,

One week ago last Wednesday I returned home from Illinois with young Ezra. He had been one week on the road to Illinois, and two weeks at the residence of Mr. Nathan Wells. It was eleven days after Mr.

Wells wrote to me before I received his letter informing me of his arrival. It is 80 miles from my house to the residence of Mr. Wells in Pittsfield. I paid Mr. Wells \$15 for fare & expenses, and my expenses on the road was \$5 more, making in all \$20.

The boy was in good health except for a slight cold. Mr. Wells & family gave him the credit of being a very good boy and we are pleased with him. He seems to be cheerful and happy, contented with his new home and has plenty to divert his attention. He rides on my horse, has two cows, four yearlings, and two young calves, several dogs, and sixty fowls to divert his attention and sleeps with us every night.

Ezra says he would like to see his Mother and Mary Francis and John Henry, but does not wish to return to New York. He has the Sunday School Advocate which he has been reading today.

Affectionately

Ezra Sayre

- ♦ May 7, 1865, Young Ezra, 14, to his mother, Sarah Ann:

Shelbyville, Shelby Co. Missouri

Dear mother,

I take my pen in hand to write you a few lines. I got a letter that you wrote to grandmother a few days ago. I guess you did not know that she was dead. She died the last day of January 1865 and grandfather died the 18th of June 1864. I am now living at Uncle Whitney's. They are all well, but his sister has been sick for two years.

O mother, if I could only see you and Mary and John Henry, I would print a kiss on each of them that would stay there a good while. I wrote a letter to you about a month ago, but as I received no answer I suppose you never got it. When I wrote it, I had the measles and could not talk above a whisper for about a week though I was not very sick. I am well now and enjoying good health.

I want to know whether you are married or not and tell me where Mary Frances and John Henry are and tell them both to write to me. I want to see how they can write [author's note: remainder of letter is missing]



♦ October 8, 1865, from young Ezra, 15, to his mother Sarah Ann:

Dear Mother

Shelbyville, Shelby Co Mo

I now sit down to answer your kind letter. I was glad to get a letter from you after so long a time. I am well at present. I have been having the ague and fever. You wanted to know the particulars about Grandfather and Grandmother's death. When Grandpa died, he willed all he had to Grandma. After that she sold 25 acres to Mr. Whitney. After she died, she had not made any will, so I do not know what they will do about it.

Before Grandfather died he told me that everything that he had be mine when he died, but his will was made before I came out here and he did not say anything about me so you know as much about it as I do.

I wish I could see you and Frances and Johnny. O what a happy meeting it would be. I hope it will be sometime soon. I wish I could come out there and live with you, but I suppose that is impossible. I wish you would give me the directions to reach Mary Frances and Johnny too. I want to write them and them to me.

Tell Johnny I wish he was here to get hickory nuts and hazel nuts. Those are aplenty this year as there is every year and I gather them every year for winter.

Aunt Rachel sends her love to you though she never seen you. She feels sorry for you and she says you need not be troubled about me. She takes good care of me when I am sick. I am used the same as the other children.

Enclosed I send you my picture. It is not a very good one. It is the first one I ever had taken. I hope you will send me yours the next letter you write.

You must excuse this short and poor written letter. Good bye from your affectionate son.

Your son Ezra

EPILOGUE

Following the death of Rev. Ezra Sayre in June 1864, and that of his wife Mary (Whitney) Sayre in January 1865, Ezra lived with his great-aunt Rachel (Westfall) Whitney and family in Shelbyville, MO. The Whitney men were active and involved politically for the Union cause in local events and occurrences of the Civil War.¹ Ezra could not have avoided being caught up in the upheaval of those times, even as a boy. He completed his public schooling in Shelbyville and in 1869, at age 19, he made the journey back to Corinth, New York.²



He had not seen his mother or siblings for 12 years.

Ezra's April 1857 journey from Hadley, NY to Shelbyville, MO as an unaccompanied, seven-year-old youth relying on the kindness of strangers was quite an undertaking. His trip entailed travel by rail from Corinth, NY, to Alton, IL, via Albany and Chicago. He then boarded a steamboat travelling upstream on the Mississippi River from Alton, IL, to Hannibal, MO, where he travelled by horse-drawn buggy to Pittsfield, IL, and from there to Shelbyville, MO. In total, it was a 1,450 mile journey which took over three weeks. He was alone and he was only seven.³

The year that young Ezra left for Missouri, his siblings Mary Frances and John Henry were sent to live with the Henry Haskell Family of Schroon Lake, Essex County, NY. Sarah Ann moved about six miles south to Corinth, NY, where she lived temporarily with her sister and husband. The young, fatherless family was separated until 1869. Essentially, Sarah Ann was separated from Mary Frances and John Henry as well, since Schroon Lake was a two-day buggy or stage journey from Corinth.⁴

Remaining in Corinth, NY, Ezra Sayre became a prominent citizen of the town and held many prestigious positions including Postmaster, County Judge, Town Supervisor, pharmacist and financier. He married Mary Augusta McQueen and their eldest son, John Wesley Sayre (1879-1968), married Tena Valentine (1882-1958), these being the grandparents of the author.



Sarah Ann never remarried. She died on May 27, 1911, in Corinth at 94 years of age. In her later years she lived with Ezra and his wife and family. The author's father, Russell P.

Sayre, stated that he could just remember his great-grandmother: he had memories as a child of four running a wooden toy truck across her knee.⁶



Sarah Ann saved the letters that she received from Rev. Ezra in Missouri. When young Ezra returned to New York, he brought the letters that were received by his grandfather from her. In total, there are approximately 15 letters, notes and artifacts passed down by family to the author.

FOOTNOTES

¹*History of Monroe and Shelby Counties, Missouri* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1884). Sayre Family Records

²Sayre Family Records.

³Route described in September 25, 1855, by Rev Ezra Sayre in letter to Sarah Ann Sayre.

⁴Sayre Family Records. 1860 Federal Census, Schroon Lake, Essex County, NY.

⁵*The Saratogian and the Glens Falls Post Star* – New York Newspapers, Articles of September, 1922. Sylvester, Nathaniel Bartlett: *History of Saratoga County New York*, (Gresham Pub. Co, Richmond, ID – 1893), pp. 577-578. Sayre Family Records.

⁶Word of mouth, Russell P. Sayre. Sayre Family Records.