

Contemporary Issues Discussion Series: Dental Health
October 30, 2019
1014 Tisch Hall, 12 p.m.

The William L. Clements Library collects and preserves primary source materials for the study of American history, makes them available for research, and supports the investigation of our nation's past. The two-page letter transcribed below comes from our [Phebe Jane and Marquis L. Knapp letters \(1850\)](#), a collection of 4 letters the newlywed Knapps wrote to family in Ohio after they moved to Iowa and settled near Cedar Falls.

What is your initial response to this letter? What feels familiar or foreign to you? We're looking forward to discussing this together.

* * *

[This modification of the original transcription adds punctuation, modernizes spelling, and attempts to clarify confusing passages of text]

Dear Brother

It is with pleasure that I sit down once
more to write to you. Marquis has wrote all about his claim so
I will write anything I have a mind to. I had the toothache
all the way to section ten¹, they stopped to have their horse
shoe fixed and I went to a dentist and he never cut around
my tooth but broke it off and got me some camphor² and
thought I had better let him take it out. I was mad
and went to the wagon and went to bed. It was then worse
than ever, I was sick most all the way. I had the summer
complaint³ for two or three days so I kept my bed. It
made me weak, besides having the toothache all the
time till I got to Uncle Sals, then I went to
Lockport and had it taken out. It made my mouth
sore so I could not eat with it for a day or two and
when that got well my mouth got sore on the other side.
It made every tooth loose and bled all the time. It
did not affect the other side at all. Some days I could
hardly get my teeth apart, my face

¹ From FamilySearch.org: "Iowa uses the rectangular land survey system of section, township, and range. The townships were six-mile square blocks of land, divided into 36 one-mile squares called sections. The township was numbered north and south, starting from the center line, and the range was numbered east and west starting from the center line."

² Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definition: "A whitish translucent crystalline volatile substance, belonging chemically to the vegetable oils, and having a bitter aromatic taste and a strong characteristic smell: it is used in pharmacy, and was formerly in repute as an antaphrodisiac."

³ OED definition: "summer diarrhoea, esp. when occurring in infants and children."

pained me very bad all the time but I had it
cured soon after I got here after being sore more
than two weeks. It was not very funny I assure you.
The last of all, I got choked half to death when we got
within ten miles of here. We put up for the night and when
we were eating supper I took a small piece of onion and
it did not go down but I did not think anything about it.
I went to bed and waked up in the night and could har[dly?]

[end of page]

breathe and it had got farther down in my throat. I took
every thing mashed and after a while I breathed easier so
I slept till morning. I got up and ate breakfast, was
easy till we got most ready to start when I began to
choke and could hardly get my breath. They
thought nothing of it, and we went a mile and a half and
I grew worse all the time. It was very hard for me to
breathe at all. We turned and went back to the first
house and bathed my feet in hot water and put hot
stuff around my neck and got me warm for I was
cold and gave me some hot stuff to drink so
I could breathe easy. As soon as my neck got hot
they carried me to the wagon. I went to bed and laid till
we got here, and as soon as I came in the house I was
as bad as ever. They done everything that could be done
but it done no good. It lasted three or[?] four days when it⁴
stopped they supposed it was in my wind pipe and wilted,
so it went down, and the cause of my breathing so was
my neck would get cold and shut so I could [not?] breathe
through it.⁵ They were good to me, they fixed stuff for my
mouth and are first rate folks. Her father is seventy
years old and he said he never saw the like before.
They were very much concerned about me. I did not
expect to be any better, but I have got well and like
it here first rate. The reason we stopped so much on
the road was because there was some of us sick so
we could not travel, but have all got well now. I
[want] you to write to us as soon as you get our letter

[P Jane Knapp]

⁴ "It" refers to her breathing difficulties.

⁵ The meaning of this line of text is not entirely clear. I believe she omitted the word "not" when talking about her breathing, but I might be wrong. Alternate interpretations are certainly also possible.

[This is a true transcription of the letter. It retains misspellings and repeated or missing words]

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[P Jane Knapp]

Phoebe Jane Knapp

-4 LMS

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-TOOTHACHE PI-2

(SEE NOTES ON OTHER LETTERS)

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