

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington Writing to His Sisters, May 26, 1946

Levi T. Pennington

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May 26, 1946.

Dear Sisters:--

How habits do cling, when once they are firmly established. Here I am, writing to you again so soon after I wrote my last screed. It only goes to show that if you want to quit writing to your sisters for a time, you'd better never get the habit formed.

If I knew when I wrote to you last, I'd start from there. But since I am sure that I have not written to you for four or five days, I'll start with Wednesday morning.

I was stirred about the place till nine o'clock, when Rebecca and William Pribbenow and I started south. That man who comes between my wife and me on the line above is pastor of the Newberg Friends Church. Rebecca was going to Dundee, two miles south of us, to take a Greyhound stage for Portland. There is a strike still on by the Oregon Stages, and the Greyhound, for some reason not clear to me, will not stop in Newberg to take on passengers. I left Rebecca at Dundee, where she took the stage with some distant cousin of ours, and William and I went on to Albany for our first stop.

Here we had an interview with that woman of 87 who wants to leave me some thousands of dollars to carry on the temperance work that she has been so much interested in for much more than half a century. She wanted some advice as to how to handle the matter, and I gave it to her. She wants to get into the Deaconess Home at Salem, and I promised to see what I could do for her in that matter.

Then we went on south, headed for Sisters, where I was to give the commencement address that night. I should have enquired as to whether the Mackenzie Pass was open, but it did not occur to me till I saw a sign at Springfield telling me it definitely was not open -- it is not expected to be passable before the first of July, as it is packed with deep snow and ice for some six miles, and when they tried to plow out some of this with a giant snowplow loaded down with tons of rock to give more traction, they found it like plowing up concrete.

Well, we came back to Halsey and then across, making just about an extra 100 miles of driving. But we got there in plenty of time for a good dinner and then the commencement exercises. The folks there had been taught by their mammas to be polite, for they all listened attentively to my address on "Lightning."

The next day we went fishing on one of Oregon's most famous trout streams, the Deschutes. We were taken by Lloyd Baker, head of the schools of Sisters and with his wife a graduate of Pacific College. I had hoped that we could get up to a famous lake in the mountains, though I should have known that the road to that lake high in the mountains would not be open for more than a month yet, and is now covered deep with snow and ice.

I wish you could see that country. The sky-line is broken by four snow peaks, all three of the Three Sisters and Mt. Washington, with snow showing except in the real summer on other slopes. The land lies high, the soil being basically of volcanic ash, which is richly fertile when water is got on it. In some places there is no soil, the lava flows being right at the surface; in many places the soil is peppered with rocks, some of them no bigger than the little house that used to stand back of our country residence, some of them even smaller, but many of them really large. The land for many miles is comparatively level except where the streams have cut deep gorges, some of them little more than wide enough to let the stream through, while in other places there is a considerable area of river-bottom land.

This region is east of the Cascades, so that there is very little rainfall. They used to do dry-farming in places, but now agriculture is pretty generally confined to irrigated land. There is much stock raising.

The vegetation is confined to those plants that can stand much drought. There is a grass that furnished pasturage for many white-faced cattle (Herefords do better on short rations and severe weather of either heat or cold than any other of the common breeds), some sheep and goats and some wild-horses, deer, elk and antelope. Sage brush and greasewood are everywhere, with some manzanite, some desert daisies which send their roots to an unbelievable depth. But the outstanding growth is that of the juniper trees, one of the oldest growths of juniper in the world they say. It is very slow growing, and some of the bigger trees are centuries old -- I do not know just how many, but a good many centuries. The wood takes a fine polish, and makes lovely plates, jewel boxes, etc.

The animal life is not much in evidence on a trip of the kind we took. There are deer, elk, antelope, coyotes, foxes and other mammals. In bird life there are crows, magpies and mourning doves in plenty on the uplands, and kingfishers, dippers and other birds such as ducks, geese, cormorants, pelicans, etc., along the rivers. And there are rattlesnakes, plenty of them, though we did not see one (it takes a hot day to bring them out, and Thursday the weather was delightful.)

Well, we fished that famous stream, the three of us, until noon, and only one fish had been caught, and I got that one, a rainbow less than ten inches long. Then the other two men made what was to have been a short trip up the river, over a human-fly sort of terrain, which I did not choose to take, as neither my legs nor my heart are what they used to be fifty years ago, and I did not want to overtax either of them. I went to the car and waited, for we were supposed to be back at Sisters and ready to start home by three o'clock.

My two companions came up from the river some time after six -- I had climbed out of the canyon shortly after they left and would not have gone back for a good many fish -- and they had caught some nice fish. The beggars did not begin biting till just about three o'clock -- those two were not the only folks who did not catch a fish till three o'clock.

When we got back to Sisters it was manifestly too late to drive back to Newberg, and we spent a second night in Waldorf-Astorian rooms in a rooming house there, and I am not joking. It was just a wooden building, but our rooms were all that could be desired. Each of us had a great big room, fine new rug on the floor, three or four easy chairs, a big bed that could not have been better, a big dresser, a table, a stand-lamp at the head of the bed, and indirect lighting on the ceiling, with an individual gas heater so that you could have the room as hot or as cold as you liked. An ample closet was off the room on one side, and on the other a great big bath room, with all the fixtures, and all of them of the best, built-in bathtub, individual room heater, and all that. It was at Sisters that we spent our first night on our way east last fall, and the cabin that we had here was the best on our entire trip.

Friday we came back to Newberg by way of the North Santiam highway -- we had gone up by way of the South Santiam. We saw again some wonderful scenery, though we traveled for twelve miles on gravel road which was very crooked and very different from the pavement on which we made all the rest of our drive. The river looked as if anybody could fill a basket with trout in a little while, but one could probably not have got a rise in a full day's fishing, for snow-water is coming into the river, and for some reason the trout will not bite while snow water is in the stream. (I was told that the first time I ever visited the Santiam, and I proved it to my satisfaction. The finest looking water in the world, and you knew it had fish in it, but you might as well have fished on the pavement.)

Yesterday I finished planting my garden -- it's all in now, and much of it up. And last night it rained all night. That won't be too bad for the garden, for it was getting dry -- other gardens, that is. I had given ours a thorough watering before I went to Sisters, and it was not yet dry enough to cultivate yesterday.

Right there I got up from this machine to get ready for church -- I mean to get into the car and go -- and found to my great surprise that it was not 10:45, as I supposed, but 11:45. So the congregation will be wondering "what happened to Ole." I knew that Rebecca was not going, as she has a meeting of the the Service Committee, of which she is chairman, this afternoon, and she does not want to take on too much -- more than one meeting in a day still has a tendency to war her slumbers, though she sleeps far better than she used to do for 35 years.

Had a letter yesterday from Parker, who is again considering the possibility of a fishing trip into Canada with Otis and Otis Knight. The last time he mentioned it before he did not think he would go. I wonder if he did finally get to Sausau for Mother's Day.

We hope to get out to the coast some time early this week, either tomorrow or next day. Two weeks from today is baccalaureate Sunday for the college, and from then for ten days or more commencement and yearly meeting will fill the days and nights. And after that we do hope to get out to the coast for a real stay. I'd like to spend most of the summer there.

I'm on the executive committee of the Oregon -- no, the Northwest Institute of International Relations which begins a ten days session the day after commencement. I ought to be there for part of its session, and I might as well be when the yearly meeting is not in full session, for at least they have me off of every committee and board of the yearly meeting, for which some of the leaders have been working for some time. When there are intervals in the yearly meeting for board and committee meetings, I'll try to run down to Portland for the institute.

Now it is this afternoon, the clock having struck the noon hour. I'll build a fire for the cooking of the noon meal, and after dinner Rebecca and I will go out to Micheners for the meeting of that Service Committee. Rebecca wishes that somebody else than herself would take the chairmanship, but in view of what she has got done the past two years, I do not look for any change in the chairmanship.

With love from both of us to all of you,

Affectionately your brother,

Lorena Pennington (Mrs. Harold Washington or something) Hiler,
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Ionia, Michigan, U.S.A.,

and

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