

Levi Pennington

People

5-24-1965

Pennington to Stephen Miller, May 24, 1965

Levi T. Pennington

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Recommended Citation

Pennington, Levi T., "Pennington to Stephen Miller, May 24, 1965" (1965). *Levi Pennington*. 299.
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May 24, 1965.

Dear Cousin:--

Enclosed is a letter to my cousin Mary, and I do not know her condition, nor whether the things I have written are the sort of things that it would be good for her to read or hear. Use your own judgment, and if you read the letter to her at all, omit those parts of it that you think it would be better that she should not hear. Maybe you do not like to be appointed a censor without your consent, but who would know better than you what would be good for that dear old aunt of yours?

I'm working, as I can persuade myself to do, on what does not deserve the name of an autobiography -- and who am I that I should write anything remotely resembling such a production? I am calling it, if it ever is finished, "Rambling Recollections of ~~90~~ Ninety Happy Years". My daughters and my brother and sister, some of my friends, especially Friends, and at least three colleges want me to complete what I started twenty years ago and after a hundred pages or so discontinued for more than fifteen years. There are things about Oregon Yearly Meeting, the Five Years Meeting, Pacific College, the American Friends Service Committee and other organizations with which I have been associated that some of the folks think ought to be recorded somewhere, things that do not appear in any official records such as minutes kept by a secretary, but things that some folks ought to be able to find in future generations according to some college presidents, and some of them are things that nobody now living can record unless I do it. And some of these things are not nice things to tell, but prominent Friends think I should tell them, perhaps as a sort of warning to folks perhaps not now living. I'm turning thousands of pages of Oregon Yearly Meeting Minutes from 1893 to the present time so as to get some of these matters "word for word and letter for letter" as they are officially recorded, and then I must tell how the recorded actions were brought about, and some of that is not nice.

Another job on which I have to work is the burning of 50,000 to 75,000 letters, perhaps more. When I started on this task, I had all of my personal correspondence from in the 1920's to the 1960's, during which years I have kept all of my correspondence, knowing that I'd probably never need one letter out of a hundred, but not knowing which one of the many letters to me or copies of the letter I wrote that I might need. For many years I have written from 1000 to 1500 letters a year. ("For many years" sounds as if it might be centuries, but it is only for decades.) My brother suggests that I ought to take the whole lot of bushel boxes of letters and put them into one pile and make a gigantic bonfire of them, but in every box I find some things that I am sure I ought to preserve for Mary and maybe some for her children after she is gone, and some things of possible historical importance -- some of my letters from Herbert Hoover I'm sure may be valuable from a historical standpoint some day. Well, I've got some of that murderous task done -- my next year will be 1940. (I called it a murderous job, for it does seem a bit like that when I pile into the fireplace letters that meant so much to me when they were written, but would mean not a thing to anybody else, and I couldn't fairly leave a score of

apple boxes jammed with inconsequential letters for somebody else to worry over. There will be plenty after I have burned probably nine out of ten of every letter in the lot, and maybe nineteen out of every twenty.

But why have I bored you with all this? Don't read it.

With love and best wishes all the time, to you and Cousin Mary and the rest of the folks, some of whom I have never seen,

Your cousin,

Mrs. Stephen Miller,
Whittier, Christiana,
Jamaica,
West Indies.