



ARKANSAS BEFORE STATEHOOD: LITTLE ROCK, JUNE 25, 1831

Introduction

Hiram Abiff Whittington's letters, which he wrote to his brother Granville Whittington in the late 1820s and early 1830s, remain one of the most valuable personal accounts of daily life in Arkansas shortly before Arkansas Territory became a state. Whittington was one of many entrepreneurial men who moved to Arkansas seeking exciting opportunities and new life in what was at the time the frontier of the United States. He was born in 1805 in Boston, Massachusetts, and moved to Little Rock in 1826. He was a skilled printer and book binder and had experience in book trade and publishing. In Little Rock, he worked as a printer with the *Arkansas Gazette* but in 1832 he moved to Hot Springs. He settled there hoping that the spring waters would have a healing effect on his deteriorating health. He opened several businesses, created first lending library in Arkansas, and established a successful political career, eventually serving as a state representative. In 1836, Whittington returned to Boston to marry Mary Burnham. The two moved back to Hot Springs and had six children. Whittington died in 1890 in Hot Springs.

Whittington's letters provide an account into the daily life in Arkansas Territory from a perspective of a white middle class educated man. Access to Whittington's original letters, which are housed at the Special Collections Department of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, is limited due to the documents' fragility. To make these rare and extremely valuable records more accessible to researchers, educators, and students, Whittington's letters were typed. Activities in "Arkansas Before Statehood" are based on six typescript letters (typed copies of the original letters) selected from a collection of sixteen letters housed at the Center for Arkansas History and Culture in Little Rock (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834, UALR.MS.0157).

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Little Rock, June 25, 1831.

Dear Brother:

You are the most perverse, obstinate, and unbelieving brother, man was ever pestered with. You will neglect writing to me for some six or eight months, whilst I am constantly writing, and wondering that you do not answer some of my letters-- until at last after I have given up all hopes of ever hearing from you again, here comes a letter, when the first thing I see on opening it is a page of complaints and invectives against me for not writing to you oftener, when you know at the time you was penning it, you alone had been negligent. O impudence, what a wonderful convenient thing thou art. It is well we are separated by the Majestic Mississippi as well as by the grand chain Alleghanias.

We have or will receive in a few days a packet of letters by Mr. Greenwood, who left here about a month ago. I requested him to call on you often when he should be in Boston, and I hope you will treat him with all possible courtesy and respect. He will probably return here in the fall, if he does not some person connected with the same concern will.

If you should feel like taking a trip it will be a fine opportunity for you to see some of your country. You wish to know what chance there would be for a book-binder and book-seller in Arkansas, in reply I will say that as there are no books printed here of course there could be not ing for a binder to do. There are some books sold here, such as school books, lawbooks, etc., but not enough to justify a bookstore unless a man could do some-

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, June 25, 1831 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 1

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thing else. Most any other kind of a mechanic would do better than a bookbinder, still he could get some little work, such as binding up files of newspapers, old lawbooks, novels, etc. If you know of any carpenters, brick masons, or saddlers you may inform them that they could do a good business here, and a silver smith, and a tinner are very much wanted at present. A silver smith came here about three years ago and remained about a year and cleared upwards of a thousand dollars, but he had a wife in New York and must fain go to her. . It is the best place in the world for farmers. If the yankees only knew this country-- that they can purchase the best of land for a dollar and a quarter per acre; that corn grows without hoeing; all you have to do is to plant it, and plow it a little. You can build a good log ^{cabin} ~~shanty~~ for ten dollars, fire wood you never have to buy, and besides, getting a good price for every thing you raise, corn has always, since I have been here brought from fifty cents to one dollar per bushel. We have a most miserable lazy set of farmers. A farmer was to come here and be as industrious as they are in New England, they could not help getting rich. If you are anything of a philanthropist you will advise all persons who wish to turn their attention to farming to come to Arkansas, where they can be independent, no matter how poor they are if they are not lazy. I believe if John J. Lathrop would migrate to this country he would be worth more in five years than he would in Cohasset in a thousand, tell him so.

If you should think seriously of coming to Arkansas and will let me know what your prospects are I will cheerfully give you all the information in my power, not only as regards your

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trade but any thing else you may wish to know. However much I might wish to have you settled along with me, I cannot advise, for if you should come and anything should happen to you whilst here, I should never forgive myself for being instrumental in your coming; I will however pledge myself that so long as you behave yourself you shall neither be shot, dirked or gouged. The only danger then you would incur will be from the climate, and as regards that I can only say, I have enjoyed as good and perhaps better health here than I did in "Antuchet or New York. Be so good as to write me more fully on this subject, I shall be glad to answer as far as I am able, any inquiries you may make on this subject.

You are again in error as regards my marrying. I have the best of feelings for the young ladies, and perhaps I like some well enough to marry them, but there is this about it-- I am too poor, for a woman that I would love well enough to marry I would love too much to see her starve. Whilst I am single and have my health I am not afraid of suffering, but should I encumber myself with a family, heaven knows what might happen. Besides all these objections the education, or rather, the raising of the girls in this country does not suit me. It is not the custom for the women to work in this over civilized and refined country. Slaves do everything here. The women, (or I should say ladies) get up in the mornings sometimes before breakfast, and sometimes after, spend the forenoon in dressing, and the afternoon in visiting. There are some worthy exceptions to this general character, but they are rare. As I have said before I intend to marry in the

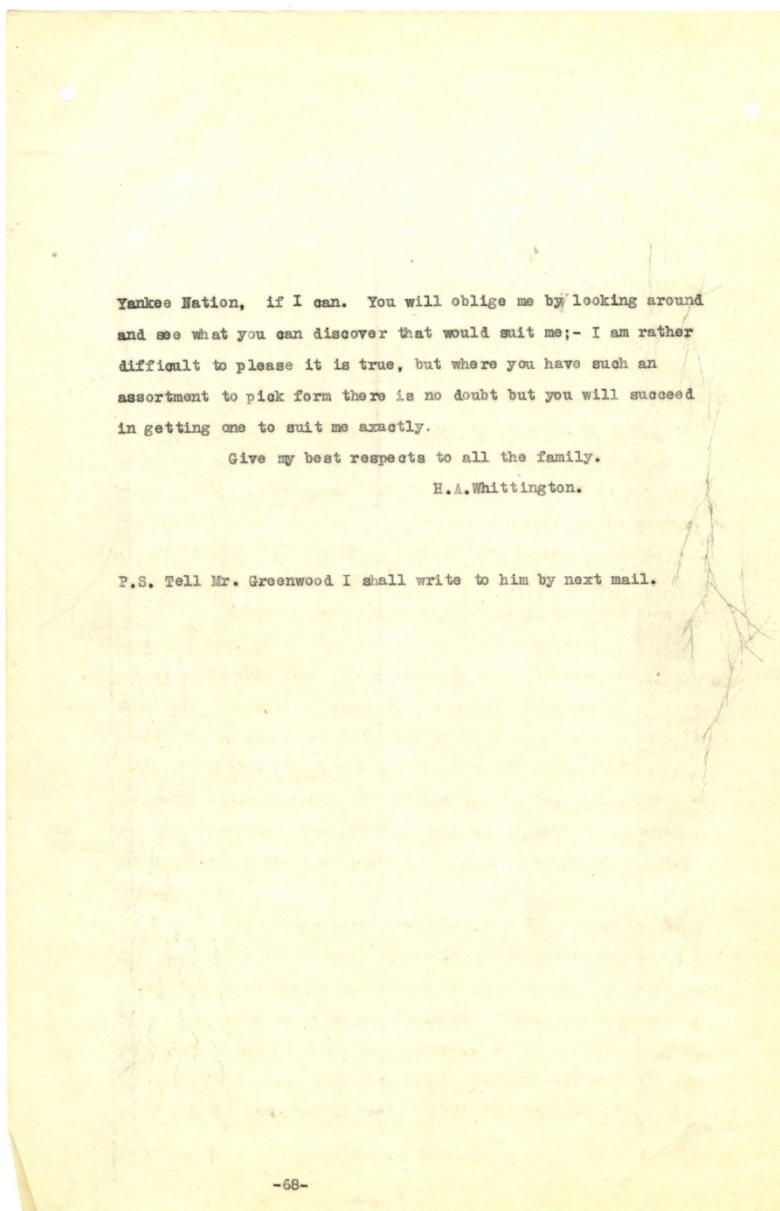
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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, June 25, 1831 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 3

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Yankee Nation, if I can. You will oblige me by looking around
and see what you can discover that would suit me;- I am rather
difficult to please it is true, but where you have such an
assortment to pick from there is no doubt but you will succeed
in getting one to suit me exactly.

Give my best respects to all the family.

H.A. Whittington.

P.S. Tell Mr. Greenwood I shall write to him by next mail.

Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, June 25, 1831 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 4

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Questions:

1. What do we learn about communication between Arkansas Territory and other parts of the United States from this letter? Why do you think Whittington complains that his brother does not write him frequently enough? Could Whittington call or email his brother when the brother did not write him a letter?
2. What kind of professions are needed in Arkansas according to Whittington? What does it tell us about the economy and development of Arkansas at the time?
3. What do we learn about farming in Arkansas from Whittington?
4. Why is Whittington unwilling to get married? What do his concerns and doubts tell us about middle class marriage in the 19th century?
5. What is Whittington's opinion about women in Arkansas? Do you think that all women in Arkansas were able to live the lifestyle that he describes? How could Whittington's point of view (he was a white middle class educated man) influence his perception of women in Arkansas?
6. Although Whittington wrote many letters to his brother, he does not mention slavery very often. But he does mention it briefly in this letter. What do we learn about slavery in Arkansas Territory from this letter?
7. Write down what you learned about life in Arkansas Territory from this letter. Include information about communication, economy, people, customs, and natural environment.