



ARKANSAS BEFORE STATEHOOD: HOT SPRINGS, JUNE 28, 1833

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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Hot Springs, June 28, 1833.

Dear Brother:

I received yours of May as I was on my way to Little Rock few days since. I spoke to my friends at the Rock in relation to your proposition to send out some blank books, but Woodruff is the only man there who sells any of account, and he has made arrangements to be supplied for a long time, and could not take any. In this country books of any description are a curiosity. Two thirds of the people here can neither read nor write, of course I could sell no books here, but still I should like to get a tolerable library for my own use. Write to me on this subject. I would be glad to get Scott's works, Cooper's Bryon's, Bulwer's etc. and in fact any novels that are interesting and of the modern school, all the American novels that are of any account, History, Biography, etc. Now what can you make up a tolerable library for? If you can as cheap as you say you can, you may get a trial out of me, and I will advise you on the subject occasionally. What are to be included in "Harpers Family Library". I should prefer this work, and of course would not want any separate works that are included in this. You will be particular in giving me all the information you can upon this subject. I have forgotten Harpers Prospectus, you can send me one or give that information which is necessary on the subject.

I have been to the Rock since I wrote you and have seen the girls, and I think upon the whole they are not as bad and as good for nothing as I sometimes think, but still they are a hard set of but little account. Your remarks relative to my

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Hot Springs, June 28, 1833 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 1

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inconsistency are correct and just. I have often thought of it myself, and have often been ashamed of it, but I can't help it, it is a weakness that I think I shall never out grow. I generally write as I feel at the time. Sometimes I love them all and would fall down and worship them at Beauties Shrine in a moment, than again I might meet the prettiest woman in the world and I would pass her by with the most perfect indifference sometimes I lie awake all night wrapt in admiration of the dear creatures, and then perhaps within one short week I will be sitting up all night railing out against the trifling good for nothing things. Now why and wherefore is all this, it is not that I am influenced by their conduct towards me, because I do not see them at all. I never was in love in my life, if I knew what it means, and where I lived at the Rock, I was treated with all kindness by the ladies, both married and single, and am still whenever I do there; then why do I at times think contemptibly of them? I do not know. It has always been a mystery to me and I am afraid always will be. All the love that ever I have felt, has been from first impressions. I have often seen strangers that I have thought beautiful and I have been almost distracted to get acquainted with them, and have been in this way for months, almost mad, a perfect furnace itself. I could neither eat, drink, or sleep, and would have given the world had I possessed it to have gotten this fair one for my wife, well after a while some accident would bring us acquainted I would be perfectly happy for a short time, and but for a short time as I would become better acquainted with her the less I would think of her. I would discover that she was but mortal

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Hot Springs, June 28, 1833 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 2

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and where I had expected perfection I found the common faallities of poor human nature, and what I once gazed upon with admiration and almost love I would now turn from with indifference, if not with loathing and disgust, and instead of the volcano, the burning mine that I had been a few weeks before, I would become a misanthrop, a perfect ice berg that could not be thawed. This has been the case with me so often that I now give up all hopes of ever marrying; I am completely discouraged. Your surmise that I am too cold and distant to succeed with the fair damsels of the south is altogether erroneous. The fact is I am too impetuous. I am a perfect flame of fire that can not be resisted, and of course am always successful.

Your vanity is certainly amusing, "Maid, wife or widow". "Bleeding hearts at your feet," a "perfect devil among the petticoats." Whew, but you are not given to boasting, no indeed, far, very far, is my modest little brother from boasting in any shape or way, it is a happy disposition to think ones self irresistible in your infallibility, it is proper that she should, but my dear fellow do not be deceived. Don't think that because you have, from some chance circumstance, imposed upon and deceived one poor deluded girl, that you are irresistible or at all pleasing, Now I expect the truth is (if she would be candid on the subject) that she married you merely to be rid of your importunities.

We have got Cholera in its most aggravated type in this country. Every boat that comes up the Arkansas is full of it. I got to the Rock Saturday last, and on Sunday eve. a steamer came up in great distress, she had lost four of her crew and

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Hot Springs, June 28, 1833 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 3

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two passengers were sick. One man who had the Cholera very bad was not dead when the boat arrived, as I have never seen a case of genuine Cholera I went on board and examined him. He had passed the spasms and cramping and appeared tranquil but perfectly exhausted, and stone cold to his elbows, with just a slight flickering pulse. I left the Rock the day following when he was still alive. Several, and I believe all the passengers and crew of this boat have been attacked since she got up. The Cholera is five times as bad as it was last season. In New Orleans they die from two to three hundred per day. The steam boats leave the city in the night to prevent the passengers from coming on board. It has broken out at the Rock, and I have no doubt will rage there to considerable extent this summer. We may have some cases here from people bringing the disease in their systems from the Rock, but I do not feel in the least alarmed, as I see from the papers, Cholera has never been known to rage in the vicinity of mineral springs. The whole Mississippi Valley is full of it, and the poor slaves die like rotten sheep. Some of the planters turned their negroes out into the woods to take care of themselves the best way they can; it spares neither age, sex, nor condition; but like a deluge sweeps everything in its course. Where and when is this mighty scourge to be arrested in its deadly march. I hope and pray it may not visit you this season, and I believe it will not, as it appears to hover about the low sickly parts of the country, and to leave the more healthy region free. All the large rivers have been from five to twenty feet above high

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Hot Springs, June 28, 1833 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 4

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water mark. All the farmers on the rivers are injured, and some completely ruined, but this you can see in the papers, and I refer you to the Gazette. This over flow will be another great source of sickness for those on the rivers.

Our election is approaching rapidly, in one little month the tale will be told I am very easy as to the result not with standing the formidable opposition which I have to contend with. I have not lived in Arkansas all this time without knowing something of the dispositions of the people, and how to manage them. I go the whole hog for Sevier and not withstanding this country has always opposed to him, and my opponent is opposed to him, still I shall beat him. This country will vote about one hundred twenty votes. As often as I can get an extra paper I shall send it you ---farewell.

Give my compliments to madam and tell her that if I am a strange, out of the way fellow, I don't mean any harm by it. As often as you hear from Cohasset, let me know how mother and all of them come about. Write often, and write any thing.

H.A. Whittington.

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Hot Springs, June 28, 1833 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 5

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Questions:

1. Why are books not common or popular in Arkansas according to Whittington? What does this tell us about the people who migrated to Arkansas Territory?
2. What does Whittington write about women? Note that Whittington's thoughts on women do not tell us anything about women. Instead, they tell us a lot about Whittington and his understanding of women. How would you describe Whittington's personality and character based on this section of the letter?
3. Whittington reports a seasonal outbreak of cholera, a serious disease that according to Whittington affected large numbers of people west of the Mississippi river. Research the causes and symptoms of cholera. The disease is not very common in the United States anymore and even in 1833, Whittington writes that he never saw it before moving to Arkansas. Why do you think cholera was such a big threat in places like Arkansas Territory?
4. How did cholera affect people according to Whittington? What impact did it have on enslaved African Americans in Arkansas Territory? What does it tell us about slavery in Arkansas?
5. Whittington informs his brother that he is running for office and that "our election is approaching rapidly." The letter suggests that he is confident that he will win. He was correct. In 1833, he was elected clerk of Hot Spring County. Whittington moved to Arkansas in 1827 so only six years before the 1833 election that he won. What does Whittington's win tell us about politics in Arkansas in the 1830s? Why do you think he was able to convince Hot Spring County voters to support him only six years after moving to Arkansas? At the time, Hot Spring County had the population of around 450. How many people had the right to vote according to Whittington? Research who could and who could not vote in Arkansas in the 1830s.