

Colorado Rockies Part III

Clark Strong's vacationing party has ascended Grays Peak in July 1874. This is the conclusion of the letter he sent to his minister back in Winsted.

"Having spent two hours in viewing these wonderful works of the Creator, we deposited our cards in a sardine box, mounted our ponies and proceeded down the trail, frequently halting to give rest to the ponies and to admire the clear water gushing out of springs, pure and ice cold. The variety of flowers forcing their way up among the rocks and stones and the beautiful moss patches were freshened by little streams flowing beneath them.

When about half way down, we approached a level bed of snow and here we tried a short game of snowballing and it seemed very much like turning summer into winter. It was now near mid-day and the cool air of morning had become somewhat milder.

Dinner hour found us again at Kelso's Cabin, weary and hungry, having been two hours on the way down from the peak, a distance of only three miles. We were served a luxuriant dinner within those log walls, after which our note books were written up, with the kind aid of our land lady, who furnished many of the facts contained in this letter. The fare at this cabin hotel is \$4.00 per day and \$2.25 per day for each pony.

We made our return by the same route we came. In this mountainous country there is seldom but one way to reach a place and one way to return from it. In due time we reached Idaho Springs, our temporary home, riding into the village in a brisk shower, having had no other wetting on the entire excursion. Our feathers did not droop much beneath rubber blankets. No other adventures ever made by us can give us such happy memories. Hope you, my friend, may sometime make the same trip. We know it to be a healthful ride, for we have all already felt its beneficial effects in this regard. We continue to feel the invigorating effects of this climate and are glad on that account to be here thirty days more and our cloth house must come down and we set our faces towards New England and our dear home."

Clark Strong was to live but four short years longer, for he died in the spring of 1878. His health had not been good, which was the underlying reason for the trip to the Rocky Mts. Perhaps the beginning of his health problems began during his enlistment in the U. S. Army during the Civil War, where he was grievously wounded. A letter exists from him to his wife Juliette written from St. James Hospital in New Orleans dated June 25, 1863, in which he says in part: "I have lain in this bed 27 days and in that time have only been taken from my own bed and laid upon another long enough to have mine made up. I am very weak. Can write but few words at a time. Have had new troubles – a dreadful abscess in my wounded leg. This arises, says my surgeon, from clotted blood that was never removed from the wound. Dr. Homans opened this abscess about a week ago and more than quart of matter was discharged. This was relief and my leg has since been doing well.

June 26 – My leg is doing well and I am in good spirits. My nurse, who has had much experience in dressing wounds, says I shall be about in about three weeks. But I am very weak and have much strength to gain before I can even sit up. I have good care, though when I first came here, I was very much neglected. A great many ladies of the city have visited me, giving me wine, jelly, fresh eggs and other little delicacies. Fresh figs have been sent in to me. These are something you never saw.

I have heard from David [Strong, who survived the war to return to Winsted and run the Strong Manufacturing Co.] by enquiring several times since I was brought from the battlefield. He is well and has escaped bullets so far.

Give yourself as little anxiety about me as possible. I am now doing well. I have not strength to write more now. My love to Lewis, sister, Father, Mother and Maria.”

The fact that he survived such a battle wound places him among the lucky few. More deaths are attributed to infections and tetanus than to actual gunshot wounds such as befell Colebrook’s Lt. Carrington during the Civil War.

Among the many letters of condolence sent to Clark Strong’s widow during the spring and summer of 1878 is one written by a professor on stationery of the University of Missouri dated Sept. 20, 1878. This letter best illustrates the character of the man:

“My dear Madam: I write at a disadvantage, as the notice *in memoriam* of your husband says nothing of his wife. But if alive, it is my desire to express to you my sincere sympathy with your grief in the loss of one whom I greatly respected as a colleague in Westminster College, at Fulton Univ., and also as a friend and gentleman. He was competent and diligent and successful as a teacher, and prudent and considerate as a citizen.”

These letters, covering a period from the 1820’s through the turn of the twentieth century, including many documents dealing with the Civil War, were in a large trunk in the carriage house of the Strong family in Winsted. During the 1930’s, at the worst of the depression, my father did a painting/wallpapering job for Mrs. Strong, then an elderly lady. One day as he was eating his lunch in the carriage house, he noticed the trunk and upon opening it, discovered that it was about half full of documents and letters. When he informed Mrs. Strong of this, she replied that she knew they were there, but had no use for them, and if memory serves me, said something to the effect that they were to be thrown out when she had the building cleaned up, adding that he should feel free to help himself to as much of the contents as he desired. The result was as much as would fit into his lunch box ending up in our house. As a child, I spent many hours reading these, especially those dealing with the Civil War. I must admit that the letters concerning Clark Strong never interested me then, but years later I came to appreciate them for what they are. I will always wonder what became to the bulk of those documents. Did the person who cleaned out the barn really destroy them, or did at least some of them survive? Perhaps the trunk appealed to him and the yellowed papers were dumped in Winsted’s landfill. I will never know.

Historic Bytes

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