



Leaving Moravia

1860 - 1869

Lydia and Joseph's seven children reflect the general 19th century migration from the east to points west. Joseph Wells Davis (JWD), the oldest son, left first in 1850, ending up in the Sierra Mountains in California. The charming story of his journey to San Francisco with his new wife, Mehitable, their subsequent trip home to the east and final return to the west is told by Louise Sickles Day. JWD opened a hotel for silver prospectors, farmed, and raised goats and cattle. JWD's brother, Alden joined him in California in 1868.

During that same time, Lydia Maria and James Harvey Pollock married and moved to Illinois with their seven children. They farmed at first, then acquired a store and went on to produce their eighth child, Emma, their only girl. Illinois also attracted Charles, his wife and their six children.

In 1868, another brother, Dan, 29 years old, joined his

*The first thing that come was them great big worms
and very near eat up the potatoes
And when they left, the bugs came
they eat what they wanted
and left the rest for us
They kept Leif and me in the potato patch
all day finding worms.
You bet we smashed the livers out of them.*

—Kate Morton, friend,
in Kansas, 1868

Uncle Amos Davis in Hancock County Illinois, and urged his mother to join them there, where “land can be bought for \$7 up to \$40.” He was searching for property to satisfy a U.S. government land warrant issued to Lydia Davis Phillips for her husband’s [Joseph] service in the War of 1812. Before settling in Illinois, Dan and his brother Charles visited Kansas to give it a look. Dan fell ill and returned to Illinois. (“...Kansas haint much of a place as people say it is,” says friend Kate Morton in her 1868 letter to Mary Phillips.)

In 1868 Mary Phillips was 22 years old and corresponding with several suitors as well as many friends who had left Moravia, Pennsylvania.

Although the Civil War was approaching and some of those friends were in the military, the war’s effect on the family members isn’t discussed much in these letters.

After the East Moravia, PA farm was sold in 1868, Lydia and Mary lived with Relief and Cyrus Fields on their farm in Enon Valley, Pennsylvania. Later that year, Lydia and Mary departed for Illinois to claim Lydia’s new land and to be near her brother and sister, Charles Phillips and Lydia Maria Pollock. Eventually Lydia bought a farm in Ashkum, Illinois. Daniel did the farming. Mary taught school, although she had trouble collecting her wages.

1870 was a tough year for the family. Lydia Davis Phillips became ill almost as soon as she arrived in Illinois, and returned, with Mary, to Relief Fields’ farm in Pennsylvania. She died a week later, at the age of 65, and was buried on the old Phillips farm beside Joseph and his father, Elisha. (In 1936 the graves of Elisha and Joseph were moved to Castle View Burial Park in New Castle, PA. (There is no record showing that Lydia’s grave was also moved, so she is probably alone now on the knoll above the Beaver River.)

And in California, JWD tells of Alden’s death as a result of injuries received in an accident with a horse. Alden was 32 years old and had lived in California for a year. After Alden’s and Lydia’s deaths, JWD notes, “This was my year for hard luck.” He was plagued by a number of smaller disas-

ters, when some of his buildings and fences were burned in wildfires, and “a good cow got drowned.” A year later he mentions that he is 45 years old, “on the shady side of life.”

The letters that follow chart the westward migration of the Phillips clan.

'The Letters

To Mary Phillips from D. W. A. Freeman, her boyfriend. Freeman was a soldier in the Civil War, stationed at Camp Curtin, which was near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The camp was named after the governor of Pennsylvania during the Civil War.

(Ed. note: The family has buttons from Freeman's civil war uniform and another letter which has faded and is unreadable.)

Camp Curtin

January 22nd, 1862

Friend Mollie,

I received yours day before yesterday but as I was on guard yesterday I had not time to write. I was sorry to hear that you had the sore throat fore I know how it goes. Well I am well and so is the company in general and getting along fine. J. W. Blanchard gave us an oyster supper last Saturday night we had it in the quarters we had a table sat through the quarter and after supper we had some toasts from difernt ones in the co and we made the old house sing with cheers then we cleared away the table and pitched in to dansing I eat the oysters both raw and cooked it snowed yesterday and I think we will go out a rabbit hunting if we can get out Tell NC she must have been