

From Russell T. Hawkins (and brother Eli) to their father, Russell Hawkins

Letter Dated November 18, 1848

Boonville, November 18<sup>th</sup>

Dear Father,

I am now at Eli's house, I arrived here on the 15<sup>th</sup> from Santa Fe, New Mexico. From which place I wrote to John and directed my letter to him and to your care at Rockport. A letter received from Mrs. (illegible) informs us here that John is in Chardon teaching as assistant for Alfred Holbrook.

I was sorry to hear that you have been dangerously sick and that you suffered so much. It requires neither long experience nor close observation to learn that man's days are but few and full of trouble, disappointment. Pain, sorrow and death are the companions of our race. Every year brings its disappointments, every month inflicts pain, and death is the Companion of our days. And yet man loves life, and why should he not? This has been his home, the place that gave him his existence, the place where his nature receives the first impulse where the first emotion of Joy illuminated his soul, where Beauty saluted the eyes and Knowledge enlightened his understanding. But our Creator is wiser than us and will teach us that this is not our abiding place.

It may interest you to know something of my travels since I left you, which was a year ago last July. I went to Iowa, and remained until October. I then went down the frontier to St. Joseph, Missouri on the Missouri River, then down that river to Fort Leavenworth, where I remained until the 10<sup>th</sup> of last June, and was employed as Clerk in the United States Ordinance Department at one dollar and twenty cents per day. I then took a Quarter Master's train of Wagons loaded with supplies for the Army, then in New Mexico, and went to Santa Fe, N.M. - - distance from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe via Bent Ford - - one thousand miles.

I arrived there on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of August and left there for United States on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August. I arrived in the States the 12<sup>th</sup> of October after a very pleasant trip during which I saw large herds of Buffalow, deer and Ante Lopes. Large droves of wolves. Some Bear both white and black, prairie dogs, owls and rattle snakes. The Prairie Dog, Owl and Rattle-Snake all live in holes in the ground. These holes are found in the open prairies and are called dog towns from the large number which are together, covering from one to five acres of ground. A dog, a snake and an owl live in one hole together. I have often shot the snakes in the door of his hole. The dog is shy but set at the mouth of the hole and bark at those passing.

The route from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe leads through a vast plain or prairie. There is not so much timber to be seen after leaving Counsel Grove, which is on the route and about one hundred and fifty miles from Fort Leavenworth, as you have on ten acres of your land.

The prairies are covered with grass which affords food for hundreds of thousands of Buffalow. I have seen more Buffalow in traveling twenty miles than could possibly stand in Cuyahoga County if they were placed side by side on the side of the road. And on the bank of the Arkansas River as far as the eye can reach, you can see an immense herd of these animals feeding and crowding the banks of the river for water. I need not say that we had all the fresh meat we wanted and that of the very best quality.

New Mexico is now ours. Jim Polk killed a beggar and (*illegible*) only caught one louse when he took New Mexico, but he caught a thousand. Lice, Bedbugs, red pepper and onions are the agricultural products of that Country.

I must leave a place for Eli to write. I shall leave here for St. Louis in a few days, where I expect to spend the winter. And from which place I will write to John. I think I shall go to California and Oregon in the Spring if the Government will employ me. It will take me two Summers to perform the trip. I think after that journey it will be time for me to settle. If you think John would like to read this you may send it to him. Write to me soon and address me at St. Louis, Missouri.

From your affectionate Son, R. T. Hawkins

Boonville, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> 1848

Dear Father,

I have not written a letter to any of my friends since I was in Ohio more than two years since, having neglected it so long it now seems quite a task, but as Russell has left a space I must endeavor to fill it.

We had a very pleasant visit with him while he stayed with us, which was three or four weeks. These long trips of which he has given you an account seems to suit his health as well as his turn of mind. He left here nearly three weeks since for St. Louis intending to take a boat at Newburg, but after waiting there three or four days for a St. Louis Boat and none stopping to take him, he left in a Skiff with a stranger who came along and was going down the river, intending to stop at Evansville fifteen miles below and wait there for a boat he got for his trip to Santa Fe, two hundred and twenty five dollars.

Father Holbrook arrived here three or four weeks since. We were glad to hear by him that your health was better than it was before you were sick, and that you got along so well with your family. Mr. Geo Smith and Mr. Riggs have been this last fall to northern Illinois and Iowa to see the country, intending to move there if they like. Since their return they say but little in favour

of that Prairie Country and Mr. Riggs I understand since he has sold his farm, intends to buy again somewhere about here. Mr. Smith will move to some northern region in the Spring, his wife would prefer going back to Kirtland.

During the last twelve months we have had an unusual quantity of rain and the ground now is completely full and running over with water. The crops, however, have been good, but prices of produce are low; Pork 2.70, Wheat .60, Corn .20, Beef 2.25 per cart. I should be glad to hear from you all and shall expect to hear from you soon. Tell John and Nathan to write.

Affectionately Yours, E. Hawkins

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*Very few corrections were made to spelling, grammar or punctuation.*

*A few contextual comments:*

*Eli Hawkins was the oldest of his father Russell Hawkins' seven children; their mother was Sally (Tomlinson). The Hawkins family first settled in Kirtland/Mentor, Ohio, moving west of Cleveland around 1836. Their farm was located in Rockport, land located on the south side of what is now Lorain Road between W. 210<sup>th</sup> & W.220<sup>th</sup> Streets in Fairview Park.*

*Russell T. Hawkins (1829-1862) was the fourth of seven children of Russell Hawkins (c1792-1868) and Sally Tomlinson (1789-1843). His siblings were Eli (1814-1899), Elizabeth (1822-1844), John F. (1826-1853), Nathan W. (1832-1864) and Cornelia (youngest, birth/death years unknown).*

*Following his travels, Russell DID make it to California, settling there, and may have married and had two daughters (some info found, not confirmed). Sadly, Russell perished while on a ship, the S. S. Golden Gate, which was carrying gold from California down the pacific coast to Panama (a trip it apparently made frequently). It suffered an explosion and sank close to the coast of Manzanillo, Mexico in 1862. While there were survivors, Russell was listed in a newspaper account as lost/presumed dead. (Researching the sinking finds that the ship remains sunken and salvage efforts have proven futile; to this day divers are still trying to recover the gold.)*

*It's not clear why Russell was on this ship, perhaps it was his job. He certainly enjoyed traveling in his earlier years. It took more than six months for his family in Ohio to learn of his fate. His youngest brother Nathan, then serving in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry in Tennessee during the Civil War, knew of and wrote about his brother's death, before himself dying in Georgia's Andersonville prison in 1864.*

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*Carol Lucic-McBean, Archives Committee Member, October 2025*

