

TWO LETTERS FROM PINE RIDGE MISSION

By Elizabeth H. Hunt*

These letters, postmarked respectively February 28, 1842 and August 26, 1844, Fort Towson, in the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, were both written by Electa May Kingsbury (Mrs. Cyrus Kingsbury) from Pine Ridge, near Fort Towson, to Mrs. Eliza Abert Wright, an old friend from the former Mayhew Mission in Mississippi, which had been established by Mr. Kingsbury in 1821. The first is addressed to her at Pickensville, Alabama; the second to her at Columbus, Mississippi, care of Charles Abert, Esquire.

Electa May was Cyrus Kingsbury's second wife, having married him at Mayhew in 1824. They came out to Oklahoma with the Hotchkins and Alfred Wrights at least by 1835, though apparently from his autobiography Cyrus spent some time with the Osage before establishing Pine Ridge Mission in 1835. In an article on the "Diary of Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury," Dr. W. B. Morrison described the location of Pine Ridge Mission thus: "Kingsbury's home, and the headquarters of the mission, was established at Pine Ridge, near old Fort Towson, a few miles from Doaksville, long the Choctaw capital." In another article by Dr. Morrison, he wrote that Doaksville sprang up a mile west of the Fort, and Pine Ridge was two miles west of the Fort. He says further, "the presence of that prince of early missionaries, Dr. Cyrus Kingsbury, almost under the shadow of the Fort from 1835 to the close of its history (1854), may have had something to do with its unusual moral record."²

* Elizabeth Hall Hunt (Mrs. J. W.) of Oklahoma City has contributed these two rare letters postmarked at Fort Towson in 1844, as owner of the original letters written by Electa May Kingsbury, wife of the great missionary, Cyrus Kingsbury of Pine Ridge Mission to her friend, Mrs. Eliza Abert Wright in Mississippi. Eliza Abert Wright was the aunt of James William Allen, U.S. Topographical Engineer, who was in command of the famous U.S. exploring expedition into Western Oklahoma in 1845. It was his father John James Abert, U.S. Engineer and one time head of the U.S. Military academy at West Point, who signed the U.S. patent to the Choctaws for their western country, now southern Oklahoma. The original of this Choctaw patent is one of the rarest and most beautiful documents in the Oklahoma Historical Society, and bears the signatures, besides that of James J. Abert, of Daniel Webster, Secretary of State, and President John Tyler. Mrs. Hunt is a former librarian and a great-niece of Elizabeth Abert.—Ed.

¹ W. B. Morrison, "Diary of Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury,"—*The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. III, No. 2 (June, 1925).

² "Fort Towson," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VIII (June, 1930), pp. 226-232.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Eliza Abert was born in Shepherdstown, Virginia (now in West Virginia) in 1794. She came to Columbus, Mississippi in 1823 with her sister and brother-in-law, Juliet (Abert) and John Raser, a Quaker merchant. They were followed in 1826 by a brother, Charles Abert, and his wife Jane Burgess. In 1824 Eliza had married Columbus' first doctor, Bartley Cox Barry, but he lived less than a year thereafter, and they had no children.

Later she married David Wright, a missionary to the Choctaws, who had come to Mississippi from New England. He had brought his wife, the former Lucinda Washburn, and they had one child, Laura Emily, born in 1824 at Mayhew Mission. Lucinda died in 1826, and in 1827 David married the widow Eliza Abert Barry, who thus became Laura's much-beloved step-mother.

When the Choctaws were removed from Mississippi in 1832 the Kingsburys, Alfred Wrights, and Byingtons came with them, or soon after, to what is now Oklahoma. Mayhew Mission was closed down. David Wright remained in Mississippi as pastor of the Presbyterian Church he had helped found in Columbus. He and Eliza had only one child who lived beyond infancy, James William Abert Wright, known as "Willie," born in 1834. They "raised" not only Laura and Willie but Mary Eliza Raser, daughter of Juliet and John Raser who both died when she was a baby. David died in Columbus in 1840 and is buried there. Then Eliza taught for a while, chiefly music, in a school conducted by their friends the Reverend and Mrs. Gladney, in Pickensville, Alabama, which explains why one of these letters is addressed to her there. By 1844, though, she was back in Columbus living with various relatives. Laura had been sent at the age of thirteen to Washburn relatives in New England to be educated.

Eliza spent her last years at Belmont, Lowndes County, Mississippi, the home of another sister, Louisa Pinckney Abert Neilson (Mrs. William Walker Neilson), and died there in 1868. It was in this old house that these letters were found and preserved by the late Miss Sarah Dandridge Neilson. They, among many other family letters, were bequeathed to her niece Elizabeth Hale Hunt of Oklahoma City. Eliza, by the way, was a sister of John James Abert (1788-1863) who was the first head of the United States Topographical Survey, and aunt of James William Abert (1820-1897) who was in command of the U.S. Army exploring expedition in Oklahoma in 1845. The letters are as follows, with paragraphing for clearness:

[Letter from Electa May Kingsbury (Mrs. Cyrus). Addressed to Mrs. Eliza Wright, Pickensville, Alabama. Postmarked "Fort Towson, Ark, Feb. 23." Noted on cover, in Eliza's writing, "Mrs. Kingsbury, rec'd March 1842."]

Pine Ridge Febr. 1842

My dear sister Wright

Although I have just left my school and have many things to which I must see this evening yet I am determined to neglect no longer to answer your kind and affectionate letter which was received long since—but could you see how my time has been occupied the twelve month past—I know you would not blame me for not writing you before this.

Mr. Kingsbury left us yesterday to go to Br. Byington's 50 miles east of this place³ for a young Lady whom we hope to reside in our family & take charge of the school. with the help I have in the kitchen, I find my task too hard—I was glad to hear you was engaged in teaching as I think you will not confine your instruction entirely to music—O how I should rejoice to see and converse with you—what changes has taken place among our friends in C— and that dear family whose goodness I so largely shared, where are they?—those two hospitable dwellings opposite each other where our family enjoyed so many pleasant hours—who occupies them? O how true that the places that knew us will soon know us no more. Some dear precious families are still left, I trust.

No one takes the trouble to write me from that place.—Do be so good as to write as soon as you get this. I want to know all about you and the dear son—and where is Laura⁴ and Mary Eliza⁵ now—I hope they are preparing for great usefulness. O shall I ever see any one of those much loved friends again.

We have great cause for gratitude to God for his goodness in blessing the labours of his servants—the year past has been we trust the beginning of days with many of this people.

25th. My dear sister, this has been by me 10 days. I have not had time to finish it and fear you cannot read what I have written. Mr. K. returned this week with Miss Arms⁶ she appears well—has been at the same school with Laura and gives her a very good character where is dear Mary Eliza now—Miss Clough⁷ I think I wrote you married Mr. Wall and lives very comfortable. Miss Burnham⁸ living by herself as she used to do at Tchubbaha⁹ Br. and sister Wright¹⁰ are in usual health and doing good. Miss Ker¹¹ a single lady from S. C. who lives there as

³ At Eagletown.

⁴ Laura Emily Wright, Eliza's step-daughter. She was to be graduated from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in a few months.

⁵ Mary Eliza Raser, Eliza's niece.

⁶ Miss Harriet Arms—Ethel McMillan, "Women Teachers in Oklahoma 1820-1860," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (Spring 1949), p. 25. Hereafter referred to as "Women Teachers."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19. Miss Eunice Clough, married Noah Wall in 1836.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Miss Anna Burnham, who had also taught at Miamaw Mission in Mississippi and at Wheelock, with the Alfred Wrights.

⁹ "Tchubbaha" is not listed in George Shirk's *Oklahoma Place Names*, nor in any list we have found of Choctaw missions in Oklahoma or Mississippi.

¹⁰ Alfred and Harriet Wright, Wheelock Mission.

¹¹ Miss Sarah Ker.—Ethel McMillan, "Women Teachers," p. 30.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

teacher is not well unable to continue her school. Mr. Olmstead¹² and wife who are teachers live 5 miles from them—Br. & sister Byington 30 miles from Mr. W.¹³—they are now in health—Lucy has gone to Marietta¹⁴ they have only one child with them. Col. Folsom¹⁵ lives 1 mile from us—has recently buried a very promising son 28 years old—the Colonel married a young wife and has one young child—the people in this neighborhood have built a meeting house which is comfortable Mr. K. preaches in it & at the Fort about half the time.

We have but a few professors of religion now at the Fort—the companies are often changed.

I often think of your dear sister Abert¹⁶—sister Barry,¹⁷ sister Hand and their families—and long to hear from them all it would do me good to get a letter from some of them—dear sister Craven was very kind in writing even when she was quite unwell. How is Mr. Craven—O may the Lord give him peace and a right mind.

We have enjoyed good health the year past. Not one Sabbath has Mr. K. been laid aside from his labour—but our days may be few and perhaps are almost finished. O may we be found ready. My only sister died last June in Hartford, Conn. I hope we may all profit by our trials and if we are what we profess to be, they will prove blessings in disguise. Remember me affectionately to the dear family with whom you reside. Does religion prosper around you? and christians awake to their duty and feel that they have much to do for the salvation of souls? If so, may the Lord bless you in all your labour of love. There is much to be done in this world of sin and sorrow; and have we not daily and hourly evidence within and without that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Your son must excuse my not answering his very welcome letter at this time. I do hope to have leisure to write you a more intelligible (*sic*) letter as soon as I can hear from you. It is quite a change for you after having charge of a family so long now to be with only the care of your little son—but it is just like this world. Do tell me about Mr. and Mrs. Lewis I hear nothing from them of late.—Do you ever hear anything of Gen. Mead—Judge Perkins and family—Mr. Kingsbury is very much occupied this morning or he would write a little in this—he desires a kind remembrance to sister who he still loves.

When you see Columbus friends do beg some of them to write me—I want them still to remember me and pray that I may be more faithful & at last may we meet and praise God in Heaven.

Your sister as ever,
E. M. KINGSBURY

¹² Jared and Julia Olmstead.—See "Our First Schools in the Choctaw Nation," in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VI, no. 3, (Fall 1928), p. 385.

¹³ Alfred Wright, presumably.

¹⁴ Lucy Byington, Cyrus Byington's daughter. They were from Marietta, Ohio, and occasionally went back there.—Byington Letters, copies of manuscripts in Oklahoma Indian Archives, Vol. 12, p. 623.

LETTERS FROM PINE RIDGE

(*Letter from Electa May Kingsbury (Mrs. Cyrus). Addressed to Mrs. E. A. Wright, care of Chas. Abert, Esq., Columbus, Miss. Postmarked "Fort Towson, Ark., Aug. 26." Noted on cover, in Eliza's writing, "1844 Columbus, and Rec'd: Sep. 11."*)

Pine Ridge Aug. 1844

My dear sister Wright—

It is now two weeks since our school closed & with that some of my numerous cares but I have not as yet written a letter to one friend. This P. M. being more than usual alone I determined on once more taking my pen, & I soon determined your long neglected letter should receive the first attention.—But alas I have so much I want to say I know not where to begin, what would I give to see you—why not take a trip this way I can assure you of a hearty welcome at Pine Ridge—as well as with many others. Sister Hotchkin¹⁸ has just left here—her husband has gone to the east after more teachers—I wish we had your dear Laura¹⁹ with us we are in want of another teacher—I suppose she is very pleasantly engaged with Miss Williams²⁰—God is good truly in sparing some of our dear friends to us—we love to think of them, if we cannot see them. Dear sister Abert and many others in Columbus are still doing good & walking in that path which will grow brighter & brighter I trust well my dear sisters increase more & more in the work of the Lord; put on the whole armour of God & fight manfully for him who bled and died that guilty sinners might live.

I long to hear how the Lord is prospering you and your dear son Willey²¹—do let me hear as soon as possible from you—everything that concerns will interest your sister K., the same as ever. Our family has consisted of about 40 the last term 31 girls this you know is no small care,²²—I very much want some woman to assist me learning the girls to work, I have wished for your skill in housekeeping.

Br. & sister Byington have recently a little son added to their family—this is very gratifying to them.—Sister Burnham is in comfortable health but has not

¹⁸ Col. David Putnam, 1793–1847.

¹⁹ Mrs. Charles Abert, Columbus, Mississippi, Eliza's sister-in-law.

²⁰ Probably either Mrs. Richard Barry or Mrs. William S. Barry. There were several Barrys in Columbus at that time, relatives of Eliza's first husband, Dr. Burley Cox Barry.

¹⁸ Philena Hotchkin (Mrs. Ebenezer). Ethel McMillan, "Women Teachers," p. 29.

¹⁹ Laura Emily Wright, Eliza's step-daughter, now teaching in Columbus.

²⁰ Miss Emily Williams, a teacher in Columbus, Mississippi. Laura was teaching with her, Laura's first job since returning from Mount Holyoke. She is mentioned in two letters from Laura to Eliza, from Suffield, Connecticut to Pickensville, Alabama, Nov. 8, 1842; and from Columbus, Mississippi to Pickensville, Alabama, Sept. 9, 1843 (in Elizabeth H. Hunt's collection).

²¹ James William Abert Wright, now ten years of age.

²² Mrs. Kingsbury's "family" included girls at Chu-Wa-La Female Seminary, according to N. Sayre Harris' "Journal of a Tour in the Indian Territory," 1844. Reprinted with annotations and edited by Carolyn Foreman, *The Chronicle of Oklahoma*, Vol. X, No. 2 (September 1932), p. 221.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

engaged in a school this year—it is thought she is too feeble for such employment she has been keeping house for Mr. Copeland²³ this summer. I hardly know where she will reside now.

Br. & sister Wright are in usual health.—The attention of this people is very much called to school & they are making great exertions for the rising generation, —if the Gospel may also be estimated according to its value they will surely be a prosperous people but here there is great danger.—In some parts of the nation there is at present more seriousness than usual and at a late meeting 14 (?) were added to the church. Mr. Kingsbury has now gone West on a preaching tour 90 miles—I expect when he returns he may bring with him the little son sister Wall left for me to charge of—he is now in a situation to be trained for wickedness—and when we reflect on the missionary labor that dear sister performed before her marriage we cannot feel contented to let the little orphan live where he is now—I feel it to be quite a charge to take him—but O how precious the sweet promise “as thy day is so shall thy strength be”—but duty does not call us to take more on us than we can bear—and sometimes I think we may err in this—

Our son John²⁴ is now with us—I know not what he will conclude to do—Cyrus²⁵ is still in Ohio attending to the study of medicine—our dear Harriet²⁶ has gone a visit to the Cherokee Nation her health was not good when she left but she writes that she is gaining. We hope she will be able to commence school again in Oct.

The care of children & youth is a great charge I feel very inadequate for the duties devolving on me—can you tell me how to learn children to govern themselves and what is the best mode of discipline—we have had under our care children from 7 to 10 years of age—many of them orphans—I think your dear W— is a great comfort to you truly. Do you ever see Mr. & Mrs. Lewis? We hear very seldom from them. Do the people in C—²⁷ think as much as ever about their earthly inheritance—the more we have of this world the greater our obligation to do for the good of others—temporal & spiritual—when much is given much will be required. Wh[missing] then should we covet more talents to impart[] Th[missing] country is now quite as healthy as any part of the south. There is a Mr. Walton about here from Mi— who says he is acquainted with some of our friends in C— I hope to see him and make some more inquiries myself.

Is Mr. & Mrs. Prentiss at Columbus I was with them a day or two but know not who (*sic*) they and that dear son of sister Abert's I was truly rejoiced to see—I

²³ Rev. Charles C. Copeland, who served as a missionary in this field from 1842 until his death in 1869. See Natalie Morrison Denison, "Missions and Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., Among the Choctaws, 1866-1907," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIV, p. 429.

²⁴ John F. Kingsbury, Cyrus' son. Byington Letters, Vol. 1, p. 10.

²⁵ Cyrus Kingsbury, Jr. Byington Letters, Vol. 1, p. 16.

²⁶ Presumably Miss Harriet Arms.—See footnote 4, above.

²⁷ Columbus, Mississippi.

LETTERS FROM PINE RIDGE

did hope my dear Laura would have written me before this & told me all about the friends in C—So request her to do so now.

Have they a good minister who is ready at all times to feed them with the bread of life. I do long to hear all about you and all dear friends and the cause of Christ in that part of the world. I hope christians are awake and are putting forth their efforts to advance that cause which ought ever to lie near our hearts. Pray for us my dear sister and do let me know where you are & what you are doing—Please remember me very affectionately to all friends—Is Capt. Nelson²⁸ still in C— I hope that dear sister is doing much good.

If other duties did not call my attention every nook and corner of this sheet should be filled—but I must stop *somewhere*—and may the God be with you and bless you & yours—Write soon to your sister

ELIZA

[On back of cover:]

How is Mr. Barrys family I can almost imagine myself with them weeping & rejoicing together—Sister Hand also—yes [illegible] others . . . well let us pray that we may all be true friends (. . .) Randolph Shaffer & son . . .

Liked Moseleys funeral sermon

²⁸ Should be Captain Nelson, husband of Eliza's sister Louisa F. Abert.