

Ruhamah Hayes

The earliest settlers to Ohio not only had no existing homes to make their arrival easier, but no passage. Ohio was a vast sea of thick forests, with trees often measuring four feet in diameter. All able-bodied travelers cleared a path, then depended upon luck to find a space to build. Again, all who were able helped to build their new home. In the process of construction, it was the job of the woman of the family to replenish the family's food supply having dwindled over the course of their journey, to tend to wounds of her family, to find alternate lodging for the duration of the construction, as well as help with the construction itself, no matter her physical state. Her family depended on her to give strength and encouragement. As for the women themselves, having left behind friends and family and all modern conveniences, they rarely began their new lives happily on the Ohio frontier.

The following letter was written on August 23, 1805 by Ruhamah Hayes in Worthington, Ohio, to her friend, Elizabeth Case, back in Gamby, Connecticut. The letter is in the collection of Julia Buttles Case, who married Job Case in 1815. Julia's father was one of the investors in the settlements at Worthington and Granville. He brought the family to the area in 1804. He died of a fever in June, 1805. The "Mr. Buttles" mentioned in the letter probably is Julia's brother, Joel, who had become the family breadwinner. Ruhamah Hayes herself remains a mystery.



Early frontier log cabin

Most respected friend,

Can I withhold my pen from writing to one on whom I so much depend as we have left most of our good neighbours those few that we hope to enjoy seem particularly near & not hearing from you we have had some anxiety on your account fearing you would not come this fall. I assure you Miss Buttles is & the rest of us would be greatly disappointed should you fail. I should be glad to inform you more respecting our journey & present situation than I can at present for want of time. We overtook our team at the north river & the crossing was the most pleasant part of our journey altho so much dreaded. ...[A]ll things went on well with us until we had sad news of the death of Lieut. Bulloph announced to us which we are sensible was very alarming to you as well as to us the particulars you have doubtless heard--when we arrived at Licking Mr. Mays was so well pleased we staid several days & I was something out of health & began to think it was high time to have a home. We then took a road that was newly cut that the [illegible] that went with Mrs. Sessions had made & their carriages were narrower than ours so that we had to cut & tug three days in the wilderness & see no human being nor scarce any water I thot it a poor time to be sick but the third day just at evening we came in sight of a small settlement It gave me much joy to see the face of a woman here we was treated with much kindness put up at Mr. Curtises from Southington & should not have reached here the next day had had [sic] it not been for the timely exertions of our friends here who heard of our coming & came with teams to meet us. We made our home with Mr. Buttles until we have another which you may see when you come here. If you wish to know how I am suited with this living here I can tell you that the ladies in general appear to be well pleased but as for my self I do not make up my mind at once though I think you may wait the next post to find that intelligence. We have many good things of life here pork is easy made but no

cellars to put it in the best of beer but no cider....A barrel of whiskey stands in one corner of one of our front rooms we have the best of wheat flour & I think the indian meal preferable to that in new england but we have no other place to store it only in bags we are overrun with mice but I believe there is not a rat in Ohio. Respecting preparing for the journey our loads were made a little too heavy or at least too bulky bringing our clock was a wrong calculation If I had brot the top part of my case of drawers it would have been better....If I was to take the journey again I would not use one article of crockery on the road for we broke most of ours. tin will doo for almost any use & you can borrow teacups at most places where you put up. If you calculate for smooth road free from hills you will be disappointed, if you expec to dress & keep your clothes clean you will miss your aim... (Foster, 111)

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