

[Letter from Caroline Palmer Clarke to her sister-in-law Mary Clarke Walker.]

Chicago, November 1st. 1835

My dear Mary:

I have been a long time fulfilling my promise of writing to you, and for a number of reasons – firstly we were a long time on our journey. As I presume you have heard all about it, I will not trouble you with a repetition. Since we arrived I have been waiting for our furniture to come, that we might get quietly settled to housekeeping before I wrote. We have now been here three weeks yesterday morning, and it has not come. I have however heard of its leaving Detroit, and think it cannot be many days now before it will arrive.

In the meantime we have been boarding at the Tremont House. I need not give you any description of it, as Mr. Walker will be able to tell you. Suffice it, to say. I feel as though I should be glad to have a home of my own once more – be it ever so homely. I am quite tired of living among a crowd of strangers.

I am thus far much better pleased with Chicago than I expected. It is true I have never anticipated a great deal, but I find myself disappointed and agreeably so, in almost every particular. The situation is I think very pleasant and the town is laid out very handsomely—when the streets come to be built up with good houses, as they will no doubt be in time—it will be very pleasant indeed. The buildings are now mostly small, and look as though they have been put up as quickly as possible, many of them are what they call here Balloon houses, that is built of boards entirely—not a stick of timber in them except the sills. There have been some very handsome buildings of brick this Summer, and will be a great many more another year. They are now laying up the walls of the new Episcopal Church but it will not be done before Spring. They now meet in a small room fitted up for that purpose, like our Session Room. I have been twice to hear their clergyman since I came and like him very well. I think him quite a smart man. I am told they have regular preaching in the Baptist, Methodist and Catholic houses, and have had, until very lately, in the Presbyterian. For some reason or other they have become dissatisfied with their Pastor and dismissed him, and have not got another in his place yet.

The houses are all small but they are well filled I should think, from the appearance of people I see in the streets, going and returning. I am told there has been but very little attention paid to the Sabbath until lately. There are so many Eastern people getting in now that their customs prevail over those of the South. At all events the streets have been very still on the Sabbath since I have been here. I do not see but nearly as much so as at home. Society though at present perfectly unorganized and unsettled, from the great influx of strangers, will I think, eventually become very pleasant. From the appearance of those

ladies I have seen, I should think as much as any place I was ever in. There are very few young ladies, fewer older ones. Almost all young married people. I have not seen more than two or three that I thought older than myself since I came here.

There are now two district schools, and an Infant School, and a gentleman from Rome Oneida County, by the name of Wright, is soon to commence a select school. That in the matter of schools I think they are at present well provided for. As to the health of the place I cannot see any reason why it should not be as healthy as any place, or at least any new settled place, with proper precaution. They have had a good deal of Billious Fever here this Summer and Fall, but very few deaths, and now very little sickness of any kind. Fever and Ague they told me they have not had at all, unless they contract it somewhere else.

I had expected to find the water very hard, but am as much disappointed in that as any one thing. The lake water, which they use for almost every purpose, is as pure and good tasted as any I ever saw in my life. It is soft and washes perfectly well. To be sure they have the trouble of bringing it, but that costs only a shilling a barrel, which is nothing you know where they are in such a great way of doing business as they are here at Chicago.

The weather is delightful beyond anything I could compare it to, unless it might be a day or two at a time, that we used to have sometimes in the fall, that we called Indian Summer. We have now been here three weeks and in that time it has rained but three times, and in the night each time; the days have been clear and pleasant ones, and the roads fine as they ever are in midsummer with you. Today the first of November we are sitting without any fire in our room and have none in our dining room, and such a softness and mildness in the air, as I never knew before.

Our house is a long one to be sure, but it will be very comfortable, once when we get settled in it. I think I shall feel as much at home as I ever could anywhere away from my Father and Mother. I cannot feel yet as though it would ever be quite home to me anywhere away from them. Little Mary too, I think of her quite often, but I have not been sorry I left her, she is far better off than she could have been with us. The other children are very well, little Charlie has been considerably sick a few days from a severe cold, but is now well as ever. He has grown very much, sits alone on the floor now. He was the best child on the journey you ever saw, scarcely cried at all. He would sit for hours sometimes on board the boat, looking first at one and then another, and seeming as much amused as though their whole conversation was acceptable to him. He was not afraid of strangers at all. Henry is very well, but very full of business. Some days I do not see him at all from Sun rise in the morning till 10 at night, except a few moments at meals. After the first January there will not be so much business, and he will be more at leisure. Betsey is well and I think will do very well for me. It is well I brought her for it is almost impossible to get girls at all here and what

there are here, secure from two to four dollars a week. There is a girl here in the house where we are staying that I am sure you would not keep in your house at six shillings a week, that secures three dollars and a half. They are very scarce is the reason, probably in a year or two it will be better. You cannot get a woman to do a days work of any kind short of a dollar.

I feel very anxious to hear from you all – yourself especially. If you have not already written, I hope you will immediately on the receipt of this. My best love to Mother. Tell her not to feel bad about us, for we are in a way to be as comfortable as we can well be so far away from our own kin. If our lives are spared it will be but eight months more before we may hope to see you again.

My love to Kate and Tim. Tell them they must write to us. James sends love to Charles and Mary. He says you must tell them that he expects to have a little pony this winter. Remember me to Mr. Walker and if you see Catherine and Cyrus give my best love to them. Tell Kate I shall write to her soon. I have had, and have still, a great many letters to write.

Yours affectionately,

Caroline