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## The European Journey of the Stebbins Family

Pamela J. Getchell

In the Spring of 1882, the John Bliss Stebbins family of Springfield made plans for a European tour. Direct descendants of one of the original settlers of that small city, their position was at the top of society. John was involved with a successful hardware business, and he was president of the Springfield Institution for Savings. In addition, he took his place as a leader of the community by serving as a member of the Springfield School Committee and as a representative to the State Legislature. He and his family had previously traveled to the Continent, and in 1882 two of his daughters were living in Germany. The family's voyage, vividly recounted in their correspondence, provides insight into a uniquely American experience: that of a cultivated democrat broadening his horizons by experiencing the wonders and perils of the Old World.

Opportunities for travel had blossomed with the technological advances that developed after the Civil War. With the new speed and comfort of transatlantic passage, the New World seemed to be engaged in a race to visit and scrutinize the Continent. It was, as Henry James wrote, "a moment of a golden age," when the traveler could still visit the shrines and historical sites of Europe, before the tide of modernization swept them away.<sup>1</sup>

The late nineteenth century has been called the Gilded Age, to reflect the growth and increased wealth of American business and culture. The phrase, however, both illuminates and obscures the era. Most Americans were not able to enjoy the high standard of living that characterized the aristocracy of the Vanderbilts and the Astors. Instead, they attempted to enhance their lifestyles by enjoying some of the trappings of wealth on a more economical

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1. Henry James, The Art of Travel (New York, 1970), p. 20.

level. The Stebbins family, for example, while solid members of Springfield's upper-class, did not pretend to desire a lavish style of living. They were willing, however, to support a comfortable lifestyle that included an affection for and familiarity with the Old World that was indicative of the strengthened cultural ties between the United States and Europe.

Like other members of the American aristocracy, the Stebbins family was well aware of their position in society and the responsibilities inherent with the privileges of wealth. They contributed both time and money to various civic, charitable, and cultural organizations, and they also practiced charity at home by caring for employees who had given a lifetime of service to the household. A sense of *noblesse oblige* may be found in the arrangements made by Annie Stebbins to care for her servants after her death. If domestics had demonstrated their loyalty by staying in her employ until she died, they would be provided with both money and property. Her will also made arrangements to care for the families of workers, if the servant should pre-decease her.

Education was an important foundation for fulfilling the responsibilities of the upper-class. All five Stebbins children were sent away to boarding school, and a continued thirst for knowledge was evident in the letters exchanged throughout their lives. An appreciation for culture was an integral element of their education. Louise Stebbins, the youngest daughter of the household, studied music for two years in Germany, to supplement the education received in Springfield and New York City. Her sisters also studied music and later maintained a summer home at the artists colony of Cannon Point, on Lake George, New York. Despite the staunch patriotic leanings of the family, it is clear that many common threads could be found between the American aristocracy of the Stebbins family and the European aristocracy that they were to visit. The tour was an opportunity to compare and perhaps to validate their experience in light of the Old World tradition.

The family's attitude toward European tours was summed up in a letter from Lily Stebbins Parker to her sister Louise, written while both were living on the Continent: "Enjoy all you can of

that which will last you through life."<sup>2</sup> To this family, as to many others, the Continent afforded the prospect of learning and bringing home to the United States experiences that would enrich their lives. The *North American Review* explained the motivation: "Americans have a special call to travel. It is the peculiar privilege of their birth in the New World, that the Old World is left them to visit."<sup>3</sup>

Together with faster steamships, two major developments made travel more comfortable and relatively less expensive after the Civil War: improved means of transportation on the Continent and new tourist services, including hotels that catered to Americans and the assistance offered by the growing Cook's Travel Agency.<sup>4</sup> Although these improvements did not open European travel to all classes of Americans, it did place it within the range of the upper middle-class, which did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity. The number of transatlantic travelers doubled between 1865 and 1880, and the annual total reached over 100,000 by 1900.<sup>5</sup> These tourists traveled for a variety of reasons, including business, health, and leisure. None, however, could ignore what Henry James saw as a duty of every cultivated American, "to recover and examine, weigh and estimate, his legacy of breed, culture, and tradition in the Old World."<sup>6</sup>

Not all travelers, however, were able to fit smoothly into their European surroundings. James, who dismissed tourists as "vulgar, vulgar, vulgar," evidently came into contact with some of the Gilded Age visitors:

Their ignorance — their stingy, defiant,  
grudging attitude towards everything European —

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2. Lily Parker to Louise Stebbins, Heidelberg, Germany, February 23, 1882, ms. in the Stebbins Collection, Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, Springfield. All correspondence cited in this article was found in the Stebbins Collection.

3. Foster Rhea Dulles, Americans Abroad: Two Centuries of American Travel (Ann Arbor, 1964), p. i.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

5. *Ibid.*

6. James, The Art of Travel, p. 18.

their perpetual references of all things to some American standard or precedent which exists only in their unscrupulous wind-bags — and then our unhappy poverty of voice, speech, of physiognomy — these things glare at you hideously.<sup>7</sup>

Fellow American writer and traveler Bret Harte wrote of James' reaction that he was "nervous, in a nice, ladylike way, at the spectacle" of the unusual behavior of some Americans abroad.<sup>8</sup> The Stebbins family was to share in some of that distaste during their sojourn.

Despite the improvements in travel, the planning for the trip was lengthy and detailed. John Bliss Stebbins traveled to New York to book passage on a steamer, while a flurry of letters raced across the Atlantic between the parents and their daughter Louise, who was studying music in Dresden. Louise suggested possible destinations, while reminding her parents to bring that much-needed commodity — a guide book. These innovative resources contained information on hotels, restaurants, railroad schedules, tipping, maps, and many pieces of practical advice. While the most reliable guide book was published by Karl Baedeker, less dignified sources warned of such unexpected indignities as the tendency of French women to use a bureau drawer in place of a more public water closet when staying at a hotel.<sup>9</sup>

During the preparatory discussions, it was determined that due to the proposed spring sailing, "it would be too late to go to the Mediterranean," and concerns were raised about the economy of staying at a pension instead of a hotel.<sup>10</sup> Louise discussed at length the benefits of a pension versus a hotel:

I have the address of a very nice pension in Berlin, Frau von Schack, where the Alexanders staid (sic), and they liked it very much. The cost is six or

7. Dulles, *Americans Abroad*, p. 111.

8. Edmund Swinglehurst, *The Romantic Journey: The Story of Thomas Cook and Victorian Travel* (New York, 1974), p. 23.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

10. John Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Springfield, March 3, 1882.

seven marks a day, and Frau von Schack, a Countess, I think, sometimes can help you to see or go to places otherwise hard to get at, I believe. Other people I know have also staid there and been pleased with it and her. Or, we can go to Meinhardt's Hotel. The price is very reasonable, and the situation very convenient and pleasant, and it is cheaper, I imagine, than the other Berlin hotels.<sup>11</sup>

While pleased with the prospect of saving money, John Bliss was quite clear when replying to Louise that the primary concern when choosing lodgings would be comfort instead of cost.

Many other Americans were going through the same planning process. Mark Twain, who lived in nearby Hartford while the Stebbins family resided in Springfield, wrote extensively of his own European expeditions. It is likely that his books were read by the Stebbins family, and that his observations may have interested them as they went on their own trip. Twain noted that an acquaintance was convinced that "the whole nation is packing up for emigration to France,"<sup>12</sup> and he discussed his pleasure at being involved in the tourist expedition on the steamship *Quaker City*:

I basked in the happiness of being for once in my life drifting with the tide of a great popular movement. Everybody was going to Europe — I, too, was going to Europe. The steamship lines were carrying Americans out of the various ports of the country at the rate of four or five thousand a week, in the aggregate.<sup>13</sup>

The savings made possible by traveling either in the new second-class or on an old, slower ship may have accounted for the

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11. Louise Stebbins to John and Marie Stebbins, Springfield, March 30, 1882.

12. Mark Twain, Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrim's Progress (New York, 1899), p. 55.

13. Ibid.

supposed exodus. While first-class fares and accommodations for a three-month trip remained at about \$750, roughly equal to pre-Civil War costs, a similar tour taken with second-class fares was a comparative bargain at about \$400.<sup>14</sup>

As the experience of the Stebbins family shows, the spectacle of tourists departing on their journey was an integral part of the occasion. Annie Stebbins, who with her twin, Fanny, summered in York Harbor, Maine, while her parents went abroad, described the neighborhood's reaction to the event:

Their progress out of the avenue was quite triumphal. The servants were standing down by the back-door saying goodbye. The Mills family waving on their piazza, Elwells on theirs; Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Eliza; and Mrs. Lewis at her window. Mr. Bruner was at the station, Mrs. White and Dewey; Janice, May and little Kate, Cousin Lou and Kittie Slocum. The Boston train was nearly an hour late, and we enjoyed greatly having them here all that time. The drawing-room car where they had chairs was on the side-track, and we had it all to ourselves. It was so nice.<sup>15</sup>

The entire community was involved in the excitement of the tour, and continued that interest while the family was abroad. For members of Springfield's upper-class, the trip seemed to bring back memories of their own European visits. Their input is evidenced by the references to recommended hotels and itineraries.

Every detail of the experience was received eagerly. Annie wrote to her sister Louise, begging for more details about her living accommodations, saying: "I think your new home must be perfectly lovely. Describe it fully to us please, also the family."<sup>16</sup> Annie also discussed the interest aroused by the European letters:

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14. Dulles, *Americans Abroad*, p. 102.

15. Annie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Springfield, April 21, 1882.

16. Annie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Springfield, Easter, 1882.

I am afraid [Mamma] does not know how the letter was appreciated. It was received with acclamations of delight, and after we read it, Fanny and I descended to the kitchen, and I read it aloud to the servants, and then flew up to Aunt Mary's and read it to her. For all, I believe, I read that letter aloud ten or twelve times.<sup>17</sup>

Lily took the additional liberty of sending to the newspaper a copy of a letter from Louise. As she later told her sister, "Your Berlin letter particularly interested me, and I have made an extract of it for the paper which I trust you will not mind. It had to be worked over a great deal, but now sounds quite well."<sup>18</sup> It may be questioned whether Louise appreciated the editorial help, but the importance of the European trip to the Stebbins' community is obvious.

As has been shown, these letters were written more as public document than personal missive. The art of letter-writing was carefully cultivated, and the letters themselves were saved for future readers. In some instances, the literary style was abandoned for a strictly personal communication. Lily, who experienced financial difficulties and depression while in Germany and England, repeatedly apologized for being "stupid," and she begged Louise to "never save my letters." These stark and somewhat shocking letters, however, serve to prove the rule that most correspondence was written in a specific literary style for public consumption.

All familiar with the voyage shared a concern for the dangers of transatlantic travel, which was brought home by the loss of one of Louise's letters from Dresden. As her mother wrote to her: "We have not heard from you this week, and we fear your letter may be on the *City of Berlin*, which is several days overdue."<sup>19</sup> Despite the fear of shipwreck, seasickness was the more mundane and common problem associated with the long voyage. Marie Stebbins, wife of John Bliss Stebbins, suffered

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17. Annie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, York Harbor, Maine, July 12, 1881.

18. Lily Parker to Louise Stebbins, Plymouth, April 10, 1881.

19. Annie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Springfield, March 3, 1882.



from the ailment and provided a delicate discussion of the difficulties involved with the infirmity:

Today I am again in my stateroom, but think tomorrow I will again make my debut. My food has consisted of what is usually termed slops, but fortunately, these are not disagreeable to me. Oatmeal gruel, beef tea, hominy and common tea with bread and crackers; no solid food at all, which I do not like as yet to think of.<sup>20</sup>

Marie was not as delicate when discussing the suffering of a travel companion. Miss Tibbets, she wrote, "went to the dinner table the first evening, but shot, like a cannonball, from it almost immediately and returned to the deck railing."<sup>21</sup> The memory of the difficult voyage remained with Marie throughout her visit to Europe. While in Bremen, she recounted: "I thought during my disagreeable days [on board ship], I much preferred to be at home, even in the middle of house cleaning,"<sup>22</sup> and she wrote in London: "I feel so thankful this much of the sea voyage is over so easily, and I do not mean to dwell upon the long one, as thinking about it will bring no relief."<sup>23</sup> Her words are reminiscent of Mark Twain's description of his fellow sea travelers:

The well people walked arm-in-arm up and down the long promenade deck, enjoying the fine summer mornings, and the seasick ones crawled out and propped themselves up in the lee of the paddle-boxes and ate their dismal tea and toast, and looked wretched.<sup>24</sup>

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20. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Steamer Donan, April 27, 1882.

21. Ibid.

22. Marie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Bremen, May 4, 1882.

23. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, London, September 12, 1882.

24. Twain, Innocents Abroad, p. 67.

Life aboard what Marie called their "big city" also involved some unexpected surprises. She was startled by the sudden and unannounced appearances in her stateroom of the male steward, and she described the effects of the violent rolls of the steamship. In one instance, a "young lady was thrown completely across the saloon, over the table, but escaped without injury."<sup>25</sup>

Difficulties aside, the transatlantic voyage did provide some entertainment. Marie wrote of one of their final nights at sea:

Last night it was a full glorious orb, and you know, how beautiful was the reflection upon the water. The band played on deck, and many were 'tripping the light fantastic' in high glee — then they adjourned to the saloon, and had a most jolly game of Muggins.<sup>26</sup>

The shipboard experience also served to bond the American travelers as they left their native country for the Old World. Marie described the experience of unexpectedly meeting fellow passengers in Hamburg: "When we entered the dining room, a most homelike and happy feeling came over us, in seeing about 15 of our steamer family already seated, and we exchanged greetings."<sup>27</sup>

The search for fellow Americans became a theme of the European visit. While at a hotel in Norway, Louise made the acquaintance of a Norwegian professor of theology, who "used to live in Madison, Wisconsin, and knew Whitty there, and who came over last year in the *State of Indiana* with Captain Sador."<sup>28</sup> She later met a group from Worcester, and two young women from New York, who "did not care to meet Americans as they wished to speak German entirely."<sup>29</sup> Lily, however, moved from a hotel in Stuttgart because of what she deemed an undesirable American element. The large student population did not conform to the

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25. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Steamer Donan, April 27, 1882.

26. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Bremen, May 4, 1882.

27. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Hamburg, May 8, 1882.

28. Louise Stebbins to Marie Stebbins, Bergen, Norway, June 26, 1882.

29. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Dresden, June 2, 1882.

same code of behavior as an upper-class Springfield matron. Specific complaints included carousing and noise-making, with innuendos of sexual indiscretions included as well.

Marie and John, unable to speak German, found it lonely when they were unable to meet fellow countrymen:

We called at the 'Four Seasons' to see Dr. Burroughs and family, but missed them, and found their card for us, on our return to our Hotel. This was aggravating, for I long to speak to *some* one besides your father, Louise, and Hotel waiters.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that an integral part of the validation of the travel experience was the ability to share it with a fellow American of approximately the same class. Although Dr. Burroughs and the group from Worcester were acceptable and welcome companions, the same camaraderie was not extended to the less wealthy and less refined students.

Henry Adams, also traveling in Europe, did not share any desire to meet with fellow travelers of any class. In a letter to a friend, he described tourists as:

Bored, patient, helpless, indulgent to an extreme; mostly a modest, decent, excellent, valuable citizen, the American was to be met at every railway station in Europe carefully explaining to every listener that the happiest day of his life would be the day he should land on the pier in New York.<sup>31</sup>

Those Americans not busy waiting in train stations took special care to note the passing of the uniquely American holiday, the Fourth of July. Louise had the pleasure of celebrating Independence Day while with her father on a steamship at the North Cape:

We all stood on the prow of the vessel in the cold wind, and drank America's health with the sun

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30. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Hamburg, August 13, 1882.

31. Dulles, *Americans Abroad*, p. 112.

shining upon us, and ushering in the Fourth. The steamer bell was also rung, and red, white and blue ribbons waved. The American girls on board made badges of these, and presented us all with one, and the Captain hoisted all his flags in honor of the occasion. It was the coldest Fourth I ever spent.<sup>32</sup>

Marie spent the Fourth of July in Dresden, and she wrote home of her experience in the pension:

Herr Rhoen was most kind in noticing our National Holiday on Tuesday. One of our boarders took the American flag, which is always suspended in the bay window of the salon, and put it out at the dining room window, giving three cheers. We were greatly surprised to hear the sound of a lot of fire crackers going off in the neighborhood, and also the sound of a pistol or gun, or that of Roman Candles and rockets; familiar home-like reminders quite unexpected.<sup>33</sup>

To some travelers, the experience of celebrating America's freedom from the Old World served to validate their belief in the New World's superiority. William Dean Howells, the American writer who served as consul in Venice from 1861 to 1865, summed up the reaction when he wrote: "Is it not worth the journey thither, to learn that the Fourth of July orations are true?"<sup>34</sup>

The reaction of the Stebbins family to "foreigners" was mixed. While Louise lived with a German family for two years and felt at home in Germany, her sister Lily had a markedly different view. Lily and her husband Thornton, who were having a difficult stay in Europe, discussed Louise's living arrangements. Their advice to the younger sister was quite clear:

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32. Louise Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, North Cape, July 7, 1882.

33. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Dresden, July 6, 1882.

34. Dulles, Americans Abroad, p. 118.

We are perfectly astonished and horrified that you are *alone* in a *German's* house, with a *German student* in intimate acquaintanceship. My dear child, it is a perfect disgrace to you and your friends, for I have always understood that the foreigners themselves wonder and laugh at that being done. Thornton says, nothing has happened to make him feel so sick and weak as this, that his sister is in such a position for he says he knows the German students, and considers them miserable blackguards often, and that they think nothing of — to speak in plain language — seducing an American girl.<sup>35</sup>

Lily continued to say that she "abhorred German filth of mind and body,"<sup>36</sup> and she added more comments from Thornton, who felt that

Germany seems utterly different to him from what it did in his student days, and he is disgusted with everything — their filth, their coarseness, and rudeness. . . . He hopes you won't care too much for it, or have anything with the Germans (males of course).<sup>37</sup>

These fascinating excerpts display a remarkable antipathy toward the German people, while also exhibiting the Victorian ambivalence towards sex. It is useful to note that Lily and Thornton had a troubled marriage. In addition, Thornton was intimately acquainted with German student life, as he was the first American to graduate from the University of Munich. It seems likely that these strong emotional reactions were derived from personal experiences and were not indicative of the typical reaction of an upper-class American to the sophisticated and cultured German society.

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35. Lilly Parker to Louise Stebbins, Heidelberg, February 23, 1882.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

The other members of the Stebbins family maintained an open attitude toward people from Germany and other European countries. Annie encouraged Louise in her living arrangements, writing: "I think that you have really been most fortunate in seeing something more of German life than most people . . . who mostly meet Americans."<sup>38</sup> Marie was especially impressed with the hygiene of the German people, stating that "the exquisite cleanliness of everything was a revelation to me. I shall never dare to show *my* kitchen to a German lady."<sup>39</sup> She also enjoyed her foreign traveling companions onboard the steamer:

The Germans on board are a fine class, and I am sure you would find many companionable ones. They jabber, sing, eat, and drink continually and are so happy. The peals of laughter from the table, in which the children join heartily . . . amuses me.<sup>40</sup>

Louise, however, was not as open-minded when faced with two women from an unfamiliar culture during her travels on a Norwegian steamer:

Two genuine Lap women got on board Sunday, the dirtiest persons you ever saw. One carried a nasty piece of greasy fish, dried, in her hand, and nibbled at it now and then, as a dog does with a bone.<sup>41</sup>

The inference seems to be that these two women were more feral than civilized.

During their sojourn, the group of Springfield tourists eagerly enjoyed glimpses of the Old World aristocracy. In a letter

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38. Annie Stebbins to Louise Stebbins, Springfield, February 6, 1882.

39. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Hamburg, May 8, 1882.

40. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Steamer Donan, April 27, 1882.

41. Louise Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, North Cape, July 7, 1882.

to the twins, Annie and Fanny, Marie described one such encounter:

Our party stood on the curbstone . . . and we had a good view of the Empress [of Germany], who was bowing constantly from right to left. Your father took off his hat and gave her a gracious bow. I am so glad I saw her as I never had a chance in Berlin, but had the good fortune to see the good old Emperor. . . . The Prince of Wales is expected this week, so we shall be in luck to see *so* much of Royalty.<sup>42</sup>

These are not the words of a democrat offended and dismayed by the trappings of aristocracy. On the contrary, Marie and John Bliss Stebbins seemed to view the monarchs with fascination and affection. As members of Springfield's hereditary aristocracy, with a pedigree that directly traced the line to the county rolls of Essex, England, in 1210, the Stebbinses may have related to the display of nobility and gentility in a fundamental manner.

The visitors were equally energetic in searching out distinguished figures of the European cultural realm. Marie discussed attending a Wagner festival at which the composer himself would be present, while Louise and John sampled the best of London theater. As Louise wrote to the twins:

Papa and I went to 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Lyceum Friday, saw Henry Irving as Romeo — and went Saturday to Savoy Theatre, and I had the pleasure of seeing 'Patience' for the first time, and was *so* amused. Was a little disappointed in Irving, having heard so much of him, tho' he is a fine actor, but, for Romeo did not altogether please me, but my idea may be quite wrong. He has such a peculiar face, kind of a wizened old look as monkeys have.<sup>43</sup>

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42. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Hamburg, August 13, 1882.

43. Louise Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, London, September 18, 1882.

In addition to visiting the theater, the family joined many other tourists in attempting to acquire a taste for opera:

In the evening, we went to the Opera, beginning at 6:30, and ending at 9 (hours suited to me). I saw the 'Merry War.' Although the language was Greek to us, the music, scenery, and costumes were fully enjoyed.<sup>44</sup>

Mark Twain, who compared an opera performer's voice with "the distressing sound which a nail makes when you screech it across a window-pane," was not as kind.<sup>45</sup> Marie Stebbins did, however, enjoy the ballet dancing in Berlin, especially as "the language was familiar."<sup>46</sup>

Americans in search of culture could not avoid the many museums and galleries scattered across England and the Continent. Louise wrote to her sisters about the fine art pieces seen in London. "We have been to the British Museum and National Gallery, and what a splendid collection of paintings the last is. My first sight of the English school."<sup>47</sup> The knowledge and appreciation of fine art, which many tourists gained in these galleries, was brought home with them, to establish private collections and public museums.

Louise continued her discussion of the London museums with the familiar traveler's lament:

To tell the truth, I am rather tired of museums, though I always want to see one if there is one to be seen. In such big ones, I am so delighted if ever I find a door looking as tho' it must lead somewhere, locked or marked private, or a stair or

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44. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Hamburg, May 8, 1882.

45. Mark Twain, A Tramp Abroad (New York, 1871), p. 72.

46. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Berlin, May 13, 1882.

47. Louise Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, London, September 18, 1882.



passageway barred, for there never seems to be an end.<sup>48</sup>

Mark Twain agreed with her assessment, when he wrote that "we have seen famous pictures until our eyes are weary with looking at them and refuse to find interest in them any longer."<sup>49</sup>

During their four-month stay in Europe, the family split up to pursue different interests. Marie stayed in Dresden for a quiet rest, and she cheerfully wrote to Annie: "I am most happy in . . . being able to do just what I like and no more."<sup>50</sup> John Bliss, who had at first planned to settle down for a few weeks at a time in different places in Germany, Switzerland, and England, found himself going on a whirlwind tour of Scandinavia, in a small cargo steamer, with his daughter Louise as company.

Their voyage had many stirring moments, including a trip to the North Cape, visits to scenic fishing villages, and hikes up assorted glaciers. Louise waxed poetic about the scenery:

Oh such a beautiful, lovely journey as we had! I am perfectly in love with Norway, it is *so* charming. The air is delicious through the mountains, and the landscape, the views, just indescribable. Woody, rocky and snowy mountains, fjords, magnificent waterfalls and cascades, picturesque peasant huts, like log cabins, with roofs often overgrown with grass and flowers. . . .<sup>51</sup>

Her willingness to ford streams and climb glaciers was confirmation of travel pioneer Thomas Cook's remarks about enterprising female tourists of the era:

As to their energy, bravery, and endurance of toil  
... they are fully equal to those of the opposite sex,

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48. *Ibid.*

49. Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, p. 303.

50. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Dresden, July 6, 1882.

51. Louise Stebbins to Marie Stebbins, Bergen, Norway, June 26, 1882.

while many of them frequently put to shame the 'masculine' effeminate. . . . The trappings of prevailing fashion may sometimes perplex them in climbing over precipices [but they] push their way through all difficulties and acquire the perfection of tourist character.<sup>52</sup>

Products advertised to help a traveler in these rugged situations included "Keating's Powders — the remedy for bugs and beetles" and "Dr. Collis Browne's Chlorodyne" for diarrhea.<sup>53</sup> The proposed four-week trip to Scandinavia stretched to seven. As John wrote to Maria, who was still waiting in Dresden for their return: "I do not like to be away so long, but as I am here we had better do it thoroughly."<sup>54</sup>

Lily Parker, oldest daughter of the family, was in Europe at the time of the journey, but she did not see her family until they had all returned to the United States. She and her ailing husband, Dr. W. Thornton Parker, deemed their trip a "failure," due to financial difficulties, health problems, and poor judgment. Originally based in Germany, they had moved to England to save money. Unfortunately, as they would find, the English seacoast was overcrowded and expensive.

At the Isle of Wright, the number of visitors outnumbered the local inhabitants, causing overcrowding both on the beaches and in the boarding-houses. Visitors wrote of sharing a bed with more than a dozen people, with mattresses and cushions set up in every corner of the house.<sup>55</sup> The food was on the same level as the accommodations. One traveler described the fish as "soles that perished from an original inability to flounder into the ark," and the beef as "the fossil remains of a dead sirloin."<sup>56</sup> Although Lily and Thornton were not reduced to staying in a boarding-house,

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52. Matime Feifer, Tourism in History: From Imperial Rome to the Present (New York, 1986), p. 170.

53. Swinglehurst, The Romantic Journey, p. 42.

54. John Stebbins to Marie Stebbins, Norway, June 1882.

55. Swinglehurst, The Romantic Journey, p. 28.

56. Ibid.

they did have to move residences more than once, and at least three times they wrote to Louise for emergency funds. Lily described their desperate condition in one letter, as she requested more financial aid:

I would not ask again, only we must get it *this week*, and really are in great need. We found our expenses more in Ventnor than we could afford, and came right across here to this suburb of Portsmouth, and have taken two rooms, and dismissed servant, hoping in this way to economize. We hope this is our last distress, as we long to get back home, unless we can have enough.<sup>57</sup>

Surprisingly, when the pair did return to the United States in July of 1882, they chose to settle in the relatively expensive resort of Newport, Rhode Island.

Marie painted a realistic picture of her family's journey, when she wrote:

We have been as busy as possible since our arrival and have seen so much, that it is quite overwhelming to my weak brain. — Of course, I shall remember very little of the details, only look back upon it all as a pleasant dream, made up of most marvelous sights.<sup>58</sup>

She underestimated the effect of the European journey, however. The Stebbins family returned to Springfield in September of 1882, but did not forsake their love of travel. Like other tourists who had participated in the golden moment of travel, they were unable to give up the thrill of discovering new places, and continued to visit both in Europe and the United States. Louise and Annie culminated their journeys with a 1926 tour of the Holy Land and Syria.

The family was also a patron of the arts, both in Springfield, with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra, and in the musical

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57. Lily Parker to Louise Stebbins, Southsea, April 11, 1882.

58. Marie Stebbins to Annie and Fanny Stebbins, Berlin, May 13, 1882.

colony of Cannon Point on Lake George. The importance of the trip in the Stebbins' community, however, is best shown by the remarkable obituary prepared for Louise at her death on January 23, 1928. Over forty years after the European journey, the memories were still a defining factor in her character. The article discussed her two-year stay in Dresden to study music, and continued to describe the European journey:

She was joined in 1882 by her father and mother and the former, from whom she inherited a love for travel, took her on an extensive trip by carriage through Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. She never tired of telling of this trip, taken in a small steamer which served as a cargo boat for the many little Norwegian towns scattered along the coast. Her love for music and travel continued throughout her life.<sup>59</sup>

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59. "Ancestors Came to Valley with William Pynchon," Springfield Republican, January 23, 1928, p. 4.