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In Their Own Words

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The first claim in present-day Eagle was made in 1836 by A.R. Hinkley. He and two companions had come upon a spring of fresh water in a grove of trees that would supply timber for a cabin and clearings for farming. He swiftly cut his initials on a tree to mark his arrival. Nearly three decades later, as the nation grieved the assassination of President Lincoln, he wrote this letter to his son, Leonard, who was serving in the Union Army during the Civil War.

As our nation prepares to vote once again, we are reminded that our ancestors, too, wrestled with differences of opinions in their families and yet endeavored to understand and love one another despite the politics of the day.

Civil War Letter to My Son, Leonard by Ahira H. Hinkley

Eagle, Wis. April 30, 1865

My dear Son,

I rec'd your letter of the 24th last eve and of course was very glad to hear that no accident happened you on your way to Nashville. When I last wrote you, the whole people almost were wild with joy at the fall of Richmond and the surrender of Lee's army. How very little we knew what was in store for us.



Language would fail me to describe the woe depicted on the countenance of every intelligent man and woman through the land and the anguish that rent every loyal heart when the lightning flashed the dreadful news that President Lincoln had fallen at the hands of an assassin. Had the Arch Angel's last trump have sounded to call the nations to judgment, the consternation could hardly have been greater; a deadly pallor rested upon every face. Strong men met, embraced each other and wept like children, and even many of those who have traduces and vilified and wished him dead a thousand times joined in the sad lament.

Now that he has fallen by the foul spirit that has drenched our once happy country in blood, even his enemies are beginning to discover that he was no ordinary man. I will attempt no eulogy upon him, but this much I will say. I as fully believe that he was raised up by God to deliver this land from the curse of human slavery as Moses was to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It seems to me that the visible hand of God can be traced all in this terrible conflict as well in defeat as in final success. Who can tell why General Sherman should

make the terrible blunder he has unless it were to show the American people that a man may be a very great military General and be entirely unfit for a civil ruler.

General Sherman's fame had become very great, so much so that he already had begun to be talked of for the next president, but his negotiation with Johnson will forever bar him from the White House; but then noble Grant has set that matter all right. Last night we got the glad news that Johnson had surrendered all the rebels east of the Mississippi, so the war is surely ended, thank the Lord. I can see no good reason why you should be kept in the service until August. I have strong hope that you will be home in a month and be assured you will receive a cordial welcome.

In relation to your voting for McClellan, I have only to say that I am very thankful that I have never reproached you with one unkind word for voting as you thought that best. I thought very strange of it and felt very Bad about it at the time, but have acted on the principle that what could not be cured must be endured. I have always felt confident that upon calm reflection you would see the mistake that was made, that when an impartial history of the rebellion and its managers should be written, you would fully realize the awful maelstrom we have avoided by keeping the old pilot at the helm. I have great faith in Andrew Johnson, but there is no man living that the people have such implicit confidence in as they did in Mr. Lincoln. Oh, my son, he was a great and a good man.

I have sent you a Daily Wisconsin containing lines and speeches on the death of Mr. Lincoln and by James S. Brown of Milwaukee. I hope you will get the paper and read the speech. You will then discover what beautiful somersaults a gifted copperhead can turn.

I am troubled very much with the rheumatism, this spring, in my back; last week I was so bad, that for several days, I could not turn myself in bed without help. I am some better now, but can do nothing of any consequence. It is a great affliction especially when one has to depend upon such help as we are obliged to now.

Accept this from your father.

A.Hinkley