

June 25, 1878

My Dear Brother,

I was very desirous of writing you before I left Washington, but one thing and another prevented. I stopped over here to see Sally¹, & intend going home tomorrow _ Sally was glad to see me, and has pretty nearly talked me out. She wants to hear all about her Berkshire friends, & I imparted to her all the information I had. Sally has a comfortable home and enjoys house keeping; her house is nicely furnished, & so far as I can judge, husband & wife are mutually pleased with each other. M^r Swayne² is a silent, studious and sensitive man. He does not attract[?] until a considerable acquaintance. He has considerable investors[?] faculty, & has, in his business, used it, to very great advantage. His partners tell me, to such an extent, as to effect a saving already, of several thousand dollars, and he is still hard at work to continue this saving in other directions. Toledo is a prosperous, busy town, of about 40,000 people. The business streets are handsomely built, and there are a great many elegant private residences, and what surprises me is the extent of building going on. Our towns in Illinois are at a standstill, & many of them falling behind. I should think, in Bloomington, Since the panic began, property taken as a whole, has fallen 3/4ths in value. And this will in my opinion, hold good in Springfield and other larger towns.

¹ Sarah Davis Swayne, daughter of David Davis and Sarah Woodruff Walker Davis

² Henry Swayne, son of Justice Noah Swayne, who served on the Supreme Court with Davis

The depreciation in farming lands, even in the best parts of the state, has not been over thirty three per cent, and where I live, not more than twenty five per cent. If Providence had favored us during the last two months with dry weather, the corn crop w^d have been large & our people bouyant[sic]. As it is, they are depressed. The wetlands are drowned out, & unless the frost keeps off until after the first of October, we will have in Illinois, the poorest corn crop (which is our chief crop) that we have ever had. George³ writes me that ~~in~~ on many farms, no corn will be raised. It has rained for four years, & the people will have to enter upon a system of thorough drainage. If this is done, the low lands will be most valuable. In dry seasons, they have always proved so. George is improving as a businessman & I have a good deal of hope in him. He cannot work as I can, as he has not the strength. He has good judgement, is well liked, and has no bad habits, and I ought to be satisfied. If he had more ambition, I should be better satisfied. I do not mean political ambition, but that sort of ambition that impels one to excel in any business he undertakes. I am anxious to see the new baby which has been named "Mercer" to gratify Sarah. David is a fat chubby boy, ~~to~~ & impressive. Alice is very bright & amiable, but she rejects the principle of obedience altogether. This I regret, very much. She is young, however, and has been greatly petted, & may turn, when she gets older, a new leaf.

³ George Perrin Davis, son of David and Sarah Davis

I must confess that my experience in Congress has not made me in love with political life. If I had entered Congress twenty years ago, it would have been different, very likely. There is no principle in legislation none whatever. On every question affecting the material interests of the country, there is no division according to party predilections. When you were in Congress, parties had creeds and adhered to them. The administration presented measures & its friends supported them, & the opposition antagonized them. Now, the memories of the War, & the love of the spoils separates parties. No measure is supported or opposed, because ~~the~~ any party is in favor of it. Besides the recklessness in voting money amazes me. The river & harbor bill was a system of log rolling, millions of dollars voted to improve little streams, no bigger than ordinary trout streams. This was done, because otherwise it could not pass. The bill ought to have been vetoed. So, the sundry civil bill. The power of appropriation committees is tremendous, & especially the three men in each House, who are app. on Conference Committees. If this thing goes on, I don't know what is to be the outcome. It strikes me that the Constitution should be amended, so that the President⁴ could veto any items of an appropriations bill. This would help. The Pres^{dt} must have signed the Sundry Civil Bill, without reading it. It is reported that he did not want to, but that Allison & Sargent⁵ got him to do it. _____

⁴ Rutherford B. Hayes

⁵ Senator William Boyd Allison of Iowa and Senator Aaron A. Sargent of California

The Country is tired of ~~pol~~ investigations about the Presidential election. I have ~~but~~ no doubt that Tilden was cheated, but investigations wont[sic] make it any plainer, and the people in my part of the country want the presidential election & the memories of the war buried out of sight, so they can work out their own affairs, & save themselves from pecuniary ruin. This is difficult at the best, & they think that political agitations of the kind, stands in the way. Investigations will besmirch individuals, & and has done it, I suppose. I got pretty well worn out at Washington, but shall hope to recruit, as soon as I get home. My wife enjoyed her stay in Washington this winter more than usual, - simply, because she was in better health. She is working out of doors every day, and enjoys it. She writes that she is so tanned, I would hardly know her. Dawes⁶ has no magnetism whatever. I can hardly understand ~~his hav~~ how he has had such uniform success in politics. Our friend Barnum⁷ is a puzzle to me, in some respects. He is esteemed a rich man, & yet he is said to be in all schemes for Robbery[?]. Of course, my free comments are for your eyes alone. I was glad you went to Scranton, but you could have hardly “done the town” in the short time you were there. Shall we ever see you in Illinois? I know you would be delighted with a visit there, & ~~tht~~ it would be a bright spot in our lives. Love to Lucy & yr children & grand children

Write me whenever you feel like it.

Affectionately
David Davis

⁶ Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts

⁷ Senator William Henry Barnum of Connecticut