

Weld. *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grime Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822 – 1844.* Edited by Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond

p. 882-883:

Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Jan. 1, 1842

My dearest Love. I arrived here Thursday evening at six o'clock. Well, came at once to Mrs. Sprigg's, found Leavitt, Giddings and Gates expecting me, and received from them a hearty welcome ...

I will now tell you how I am situated. Mrs. Spriggs is directly in front of the Capitol and about as far from it as from our home to Mrs. Holmes' or Mr. Spear's. The iron railing around the Capitol Park comes within fifty feet of our door. Our dining room overlooks the whole Capitol Park which is one mile around and filled with shade trees and shrubbery. I have a pleasant room the second floor with a good bed, plenty of covering, a bureau, table, chairs, closets and clothes press, a good fire place, and plenty of dry wood to burn in it. We have about twenty boarders, mostly members of Congress, 8 of them from Pennsylvania and the rest from the free states. Only Gates and Giddings [are] abolitionists, but all the others are favorable. They treat brother Leavitt and myself exactly as though we were not fan[a]tics, and we talk over with them at the table and elsewhere abolition just as we should at home.

Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Jan. 2, 1842

. . . In my letter of yesterday I did not state how I get along as to diet. Well 1st. We have always upon the table Graham bread and corn bread. A pitcher of milk is always set by my plate and a deep soup plate for a bowl so that I can always have bread and milk, and with that alone I can always have a good diet, good enough. The milk by the way is very good. Mush we have always once and generally twice a day; apples always once a day; at dinner potatoes, turnips, parsnips, spinnage [sic] with eggs, almonds, raisins, figs and bread; the puddings, pies, cakes, etc., etc., I have of course nothing to do with. My anti-meat, butter, tea and coffee, etc. ism excites of course some attention but no sneers. Our boarders are, about a dozen of them, members of Congress viz, Giddings of Ohio, Calhoun (William Barton) of Mass., Gates and wife of New York, Lawrence (Joseph), Irvin (James), Henry (Thomas), Simonton (William), Ramsey (Robert), and Russell (James M.) of Pennsylvania. ... Besides, there is Captain Hardy (Joseph L.C.) of the Marines; Mr. Frost, one of the clerks in the Clerks office of the House of Reps, with his wife; Mr. Lloyd of Ohio, a lawyer here on business with Congress (attended my course of A.S. Lectures in Cleveland in '35); Mr. Radcliff of New York; and another whose name I don't know. Of these Giddings and Gates are abolitionists; Calhoun, Lawrence and indeed all the members of Congress who board here are to say the least not only in a state of mind to tolerate our sentiments but take pains to treat Mr. Leavitt and myself with courtesy and respect at the table and elsewhere. We speak on the subject of slavery with entire freedom, nobody gain-saying us.

Mrs. Sprigg, our landlady, is a Virginian not a slaveholder, but hires slaves. She has eight servants all colored, 3 men, one boy and 4 women. All are free but 3 which she hires and these are buying themselves.

Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Jan. 18, 1842

... I believe I have told you before that Mrs. Gates is here with her husband. She is a second wife, married but a few weeks. She was a teacher in a female seminary in western New York. A very interesting woman. She and her husband both heartily adopt the Oberlin views. Almost all the members of Congress who board here are professors of religion, and five of them are elders in the presbyterian Church! Giddings of Ohio, Gates, N.Y., Judges Ramsey and Henry and Dr.

Simonton of Penn. None of them but Gates however seems to have felt much of the power of the gospel, and he shrivels in this atmosphere.

Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Dec. 27, 1842

I arrived here this evening, at six o'clock. Well. Found Giddings, Leavitt, and Gates all together, and in a few minutes D.L. Child came in. The latter does not board here; he applied, but as Leavitt had already engaged the only room left here (at Mrs. Spriggs) for me, he was obliged to go elsewhere. I am sorry for it – wish we could all be together. Mrs. Sprigg has now twenty five boarders, and here is a singular fact, and one that speaks well for Abolition in Washington – it is that for the last two years this has been known as the “Abolition house”: Giddings, Gates and Leavitt, abolitionists, and all the other boarders favorably inclined. Mrs. Sprigg has always feared that the character of her house would be hurt by it and that members of Congress would shun her.

We have feared so too. Now mark, this house is at this moment, as Giddings tells, the only boarding house in Washington which has all its rooms and beds occupied, and this too, notwithstanding she has not, as most of the other boarding houses have done, lowered her price at all. All the members of Congress that boarded here last winter are here now and Mr. Slade of Vermont, Ex-Governor Crafts of Vermont, member of the Senate and vice president [of] the Vt. Anti-slavery society, Ex-Governor Morrow of Ohio, and S.N. Clarke of western New York. Messrs. Slade, Irwin and Judge Henry have their wives with them. My room is a very comfortable pleasant one on the second story in the southeast corner, finely situated both for light and warmth. I pay eight dollars a week for board, room, fire, lights, shoe brushing, etc. You recollect that all the table waiters that were here last year have run away. Mrs. Sprigg thinks it quite unsafe to have slaves in such close contact with Abolitionists, so she has taken care to get free colored servants in their places! Stick a pin there.

Footnote:

5 – In his letters to his family, Giddings noted these runaways. One they called “Poor Robert” left on a Monday evening, “and the next he was heard from he was 'way up there in York State, full tilt for Canada.” (Giddings to his son, Addison Giddings, August 13, 1842, Giddings Papers.) Six years later Seth M. Gates, one of the insurgent Congressmen from New York, entertained at his home in Warsaw, N.Y., another of the slaves who had served at the Abolition House – John Douglass, who had escaped soon after Poor Robert. After eighteen months in Canada John had returned to this country and was living prosperously in Rochester. Poor Robert, he said, had moved from Canada to Buffalo, where he had a family. He was a cook on a lake steamer, had steady work, and was doing well. The underground railway agent at Washington for these and numerous other fugitives was one Smallwood of the Navy Yard. Smallwood's method was to collect slaves one by one, and hide them in a garret. It took three weeks or more to collect a gang of eighteen, enough to make a trip North worthwhile. When the gang was collected, it was rushed North and picked up somewhere near Philadelphia by another agent of the railroad. Such at least were the details of the underground railroad station at Washington as told to Gates by John Douglass. See S.M. Gates to Giddings, December 5, 1848 (Giddings Papers).

Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Jan. 4, 1843

...

Dear S. asks about my diet. Very much as last year. Corn bread, Irish and sweet potatoes, stewed applesauce, raw apples, parsnips, turnips, and occasionally cabbage, rice, milk, toasted bread, etc. I do not use milk so freely as I did last winter, thinking it may be, if used plentifully, too bilious for me. ...

You ask if Leavitt and I occupy the same fire to study by as last winter. I have a fire in my room and room alone, have a table, secretary, and drawers in which to put my books, clothes, etc. Abolition is talked not only at our table but all over Washington.