

Letter from Susannah (Ferris) Doty To her son, Elijah Doty II

[Susannah (Ferris) Doty (1732-1825), my five-times great grandmother, wrote this letter to her son, Elijah Doty (b. 1761), living near Fort Niagara, at the close of the War of 1812. His son, Ambrose, to whom she refers, was taken prisoner, and died at Halifax. He lost two other children during the war, his house was burned, and he, with his family, was driven from his home. (Adapted from the original Editor's note.)

[The following is a retyped copy of a first-generation or later transcription of the original letter, which is not available to the best of my knowledge. The transcribed letter was found in a scrapbook of clippings that appears to have been assembled at the end of the 19th Century or beginning of the 20th. The original clipping is undated.

[Contrary to Susannah's expectations of impending death, she lived another ten years.

Stephen Haynes
Minneapolis, MN
February 16, 2012]

Albany, N.Y. April 27, 1815

Dear Child:

It hath rested on my mind for some time with a great concern for thee and feeling myself a poor miserable creature by reason of old age and infirmity of both mind and body : not capable of writing my real wishes to you, being almost eight-three years of age, I have deferred it till now; and still feeling my mind drawn in much love to thee, with hearty wishes for thy welfare, both here and hereafter, and being fully sensible thy trials and more afflictions which have come upon thee, are very great. Oh! may they be sanctified in you both to a good purpose. The variety of trials you have lately met with, are but a specimen of what you are to expect in some form or other, so long as you breathe the air of this fallen world. The longer we are without them, the more our need of them is increased : and they never give great benefit, but where something is to be torn off that sticks to close to us. O! my dear children I feel with you in your trials and sore afflictions which must be great. I thought I could mourn with you in the nearest ties of an affectionate mother, not doubting but what our loss was their eternal gain. Your dear offspring have gone through the dark valley and shadow of death, and I doubt not but they are landed in the happy realms of bliss; and O! my dear children, remember that all flesh is as grass and as the flower of the field which fades away and dies : "but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

May you, and your dear offspring which are left behind be in readiness for your last change, when the archangel will sound a trumpet in your ears that time shall be no longer to you here. There is a day of visitation which the Lord hath extended unto us that we might each one observe our time and season, and be exercised in, even for our everlasting peace and happiness. My dear child, we must all be accountable to the great God, for the deeds done in the body. Therefore we have need to weigh and measure our doings, that we may stand justified in the sight of God, through Jesus Christ; by whom we are visited. My mind hath oftentimes been roused with a concern for my dear children and grand-children, with longing desires that they might choose that good part which will never be taken from them. O! my dear children, why do we mourn for our dear connection, whom we believe are gone to the eternal realms of bliss, and happiness, where all pain and sorrow are done away; then and there to enjoy the fruition of glory forevermore.

My dear grandson, Ambrose Doty, hath been near to my heart, ever since he was at Albany, — a promising youth indeed : but oh! he hath fallen a victim to his enemies — those who can kill the body, but have no power over the soul. Blessed be the God and father of all our mercies; he hears his children when they cry, and takes them for his own. O! may you always adore him as your loving benefactor. Our blessed Lord hath left an invitation to us all. “Come unto me,” says he, “all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” “Behold,” says he, “I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” O! blessed invitation, and promise likewise, to us poor mortals. What door is this but the heart of man. O! Elijah, may thou receive these, with a thankful heart, and be encouraged to wait on God at all times, though thy burdens may be heavy at this time, upon thee; yet as thou livest near to that which is made known to thee in secret, thou wilt be able to overcome them, and to rejoice in God, the Savior; and to sing the song of Moses and the lamb, praising the great I Am, forevermore, for thy deliverance. My dear child; my expectation of ever seeing thee again is almost gone : fully believing that my glass is nearly run down.

I feel myself a prisoner of hope here, waiting the time of my master’s will to unclot me of this body of clay : with earnest cries to him that he will take me to himself.

I am not willing to burden you with words; but my concern is for my dear children, and grand-children. They feel near to my heart, and I heartily wish, that I with you, and you with me, might live each day, as we would wish to be found at the hour of death. So desireth, and so prayeth, thy ever well-wishing Mother.

O! may God's will be done in each of us, that we may meet again in the happy realms of bliss; praising his name forevermore, who is worthy of all honor. I have been better in health for some months, than usual, though I feel the decay of nature stealing on me fast, and my memory is much lost, yet I am sensible of the great goodness of Almighty God to me. He hath carried me through many hard trials and sore afflictions.

O! blessed be his worthy name forevermore. Farewell, Elijah Doty. My love is to all thy family, as though named.

Susannah Doty