

Preface to the letter:

Prefacing the transcribed letter appears the following

This is a copy of an original letter,¹ not dated and no city given, from James to Joshua, written on a letter head with the picture on both sides of the “Harrison Medal.” Printed underneath the pictures are these words:

Resolved by the senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, That the THANKS of CONGRESS be, and they are hereby presented to Major General WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, and ISAAC SHELBY, late Governor of Kentucky, and through them to the OFFICERS and MEN under their command, for their gallantry and good conduct in defeating the combined BRITISH and INDIAN forces under Major General PROCTOR, on the Thames, in Upper Canada, on the 5th day of October, 1813, capturing the BRITISH ARMY, with their baggage, camp equipage, and artillery” and that the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES be requested to cause two GOLD MEDALS to be struck, emblematical of this TRIUMPH, and presented to General HARRISON, and ISAAC SHELBY, late Governor of Kentucky.

H. CLAY, Speaker House of Representatives
JOHN GAILLARD Pres, Senate pro tempore

April 4, 1818 Approved:

JAMES MONROE [President].

Unanimously adopted.
See Niles Register Vol. XIV, Page 186.

From the existence and content of this letterhead Florence Schwalm concluded that the family was living in or near Louisville, Kentucky, at the time it was written, and the best she could estimate for its date was “sometime after 1833.” The content of the letter does not support that conclusion, however,² and its probable date falls 1841-44, as close examination of several of the letter’s statements makes clear (some of them based on facts that have come to light since Florence did her genealogy).

Consider the following table:

¹ - The phrase “This is a copy of an original letter” is unfortunately ambiguous. Does it refer to Joshua’s transcription of James’s original letter? Does it refer to Florence Elizabeth (Smith) Schwalm’s first-order typed transcription of Joshua’s transcription? Was the typed transcription prepared directly from James’s letter?

² - See note 4 below.

Letter text	Date	Comments
“About the first of June last, I paid a visit to Caleb, at Little Rock, Arkansas, intending if I was pleased with the country, to move my family there. I went up the Arkansas River in the same boat with Josephine and did not know her till the day we landed.”	In or after 1841	Caleb and Josephine were married in Nov. 1839. Assuming they were married as of the date of James’s trip up the Arkansas. James’s trip was no earlier than June 1840, and the letter was written in or after 1841.
“You [Joshua] have a wife and two children”	1841-44	Joshua was first married in Sep. 1837. His second child was born in Dec. 1841, and his third in Sep. 1844. That places the letter 1841-44.
“My dear Mary and the children send their love to Father, Mother and all the rest.”	After 1838	James’s second child (Arabella) was born in about 1837 in Delaware (according to 1850 Census).

Dear Joshua:

Your letter of the 28th July lies before me, having been received last mail. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw it was from you as it is nearly four years since I had the honor or receiving the smallest contribution of an epistolary kind from you, I will not upbraid you for neglect, though it will always remain a mystery to me how you can act with such unfeeling apathy.

With the exception of the allusions and remarks about Caleb, your letter gave me much pleasure. Between brothers, there should be nothing but love, and when faults are committed, they ought to be palliated or concealed, instead of being published about to the prejudice of the offender. I confess that I cheated you sadly, for instead of letting Caleb know anything about what you wrote, in a letter which goes this mail I have told him of your intention to come to America, and everything in your epistle but what was unfavorable to him, or calculated to give him pain. I had a letter from Caleb by the same mail that brought yours in which he tells me that his wife, Josephine, was dangerously sick, and that if she gets well, he will leave Arkansas and find a home in Indiana in the spring. Your brother Caleb is a fine, robust, well-doing young man, much respected where he lives, with easy, offhand manners and an uncommonly well-informed mind. He has his faults, and when we all get together, we will tell him of them.

About the first of June last, I paid a visit to Caleb, at Little Rock, Arkansas, intending if I was pleased with the country, to move my family there. I went up the Arkansas River in the same boat with Josephine and did not know her till the day we landed. She is a very fine woman, possessing a most agreeable personality, an easy and graceful address, and a countenance

beaming with beauty and intelligence. I need not say that Caleb is fondly attached to her, and if a good wife is peculiarly a blessing from the Lord, he has certainly secured it.

While I was at Little Rock, I had a severe attack of bilious fever that kept me confined to bed for two weeks. Never was a patient attended to with more hospitality, patience and affection. My slightest wish was gratified, and everything that love or friendship could suggest, was put in requisition for my comfort. Indeed my dear Jos. [Joshua], to their devoted care of me I am mainly indebted for my recovery. I found the climate of Arkansas disagreeably hot and unhealthy. There is the richest land there I ever saw, but the country is interspersed with immense cypress swamps caused by the overflowing of the mighty streams that roll through it, the exhalations from which in the summer season are dreadfully fatal to strangers. Death has made fearful ravages there this Summer and Fall and I came home determined not to emigrate to a country where the risk of life, health, and enjoyment was so great. I had two grand scuffles with the “King of Terrors” during my trip. On one occasion, while ascending the Mississippi in a small stern wheeler steam boat, I fell overboard³ and was immediately swept down with the mighty current, narrowly escaping the wheel in my fall, one stroke of which would have dashed me to pieces. I was heavily encumbered with my clothes, but I struck out manfully hoping to reach the shore which was about a mile from me. To make a long story short, I was picked up by the yawl of the steam boat when I had not strength to sustain myself one short minute longer. The other was my sickness in Little Rock, from which God also delivered me. Glory to his name.

I am really concerned that your mercantile speculations involved you so seriously. Yet, my dear Jos., the hand of God was evidently in it. If you had succeeded, you might have been led away by a worldly spirit and become proud and uncharitable. Your debts must undoubtedly be paid, yet in doing this, you must act with great prudence. You have a wife and two children wholly dependent on your exertions for support. You are without any regular calling or means of life, and though you now have got a situation, it will not last forever. You must therefore go to your creditors, inform them exactly of your situation and tell them that you wish to emigrate to America that you may better your circumstances, and that you will pay them as soon as you possibly can. If they agree to this, well. But if not, and you have no more means than 100 Pounds, by no means place out of your hands the indispensable foundation of your future prosperity. To come to America without means would be utter madness, and with 100 Pounds, small as it is, you can do well if you are industrious, for money goes much farther here than in Ireland. I am glad that you think of coming to America and I will proceed to give you such information as my own observation enables me to furnish, on every word of which you may place implicit confidence.

In this State there is yet some Congress land⁴ which you can buy for one dollar and a quarter an acre. Eighty acres of land will do you very well at first, but as you are no axeman and have never been used to the hardships of a log cabin life, I could hardly advise you to buy any Congress land to settle on. You would be obliged to hire everything to be done for you and you

³ - Purely speculatively, we must wonder if James was drunk; the likelihood stems from his known problems with alcohol.

⁴ - “Congress land” was a peculiarity of States admitted to the Union beginning with Ohio (admitted 1 March 1803). Congress lands were also found in Indiana, but not according to my research in Kentucky (admitted 1 June 1792). Thus, while “this State” may refer to Indiana (where James, Mary Jane and family lived beginning before 1838), it doesn’t refer to Kentucky.

would soon find that your funds would be exhausted before you had effected anything like a decent settlement. However, this objection would not be of so much effect if you settled in Wisconsin, a fine, healthy, flourishing region, about six days from me. There, the land is covered with small prairies, with groves of timber around them, and the search of a few days would enable you to find a location where you would have prairie land enough for a large farm and timber enough for all purposes. This prairie land is entirely free from trees and resembles your fallow ground at home, only it is harder to break up. You have no idea how soon your substance would increase were you settled on a piece of land like what I have described, but I believe the most prudent plan would be for you to purchase in some fine healthy neighborhood like that in which I live, a farm that would be valued at 300 or 400 Pounds. You can always in this country buy on credit, and then you have a good large clearing, an orchard, a good house and other buildings, and go ahead to make money with your plow and your stock. I know of many farms of 200 or 300 acres with probably 70 or 80 acres cleared, good orchards and comfortable buildings that can be obtained by paying one-fourth down and the balance in yearly payments. 300 or 400 Pounds would purchase a very good place where you might get rich and do well and have a steady home and occupation. It would be no use for me to particularize any place to you. When you come, we will ride around in all directions and I have no fear of your ever regretting your emigration to America.

Caleb enclosed me a letter from Mother, which filled me with gratitude. What would I not give to see that sainted and venerable woman, and our unequalled father. Lord, spare them both to watch over and pray for us. I am quite uneasy about Catharine and Martha. If we had them here, they would get married directly to well-doing and industrious men, while in Ireland I know not that they have any chance of a comfortable settlement. There are no such things as old maids in this country, and in this whole country I know not nor have I ever seen a beggar. Were I able, I would pay their (the girls') passage over, and soon get them fixed. I am glad that our brother John is prospering. May he continue to do so.

I wrote a letter to Thomas some time ago, requesting him to send me via New Orleans a pair of 18 inch globes. If you are about to write to him, urge him to do all that I told him and I will pay him the money. I want them for Johnny and can't get them here unless at an enormous price.

I never got John's letter in reply to one I wrote to him. I have abandoned any idea of assistance from John Smyth, but will you be kind enough to call on him and present him and the old man with our best respects. Tell him we are well and doing well and that I want him to write to me. I wrote him a long letter some time ago, giving him some information he asked for relative to the best location of the public land, etc. I thought he probably wanted to buy some. It would be a fine investment for money.

Write me if you know anything of our sister Sarah, of my Aunt or Ship Hodgkinson. Kiss my mother and father for me and give my respects to your dear wife. You have never mentioned your wife's name, family, or anything to me. You deserve to be kicked for your neglect. I want to be introduced to her. Remember me to her, and our friends. My dear Mary and the children send their love to Father, Mother and all the rest.

Let me hear from you soon,

Your brother,

James H. Lanktree