Lenoir County, NC - HARPER LETTERS

~~~~~~~~~~

Note: James Madison Harper (1809-1858), a descendant of Francis Harper, Sr. (b. ca 1734) and Elizabeth Bright, married about 1834 Charlotte Elizabeth Parrott (1815-1879), a great-granddaughter of John Parrott (ca 1730-1791) and Elizabeth Oxley, and a granddaughter of William Arendell (will dated 1822). This couple made their home at Harper's Landing, in the Bucklesberry region of Lenoir County, a few miles upstream from Kinston, where they reared the following children:

(1) Francis Marion Harper, b. 1835, married Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) Croom
(2) Mary Eliza Harper, b. 1838, married Noah Rouse
(3) Jacob Parrott Harper, b. 1840, married Ava Wood
(4) Persis Susan Harper, b. 1843, married Simon E. Hodges
(5) Martha Eleanor Harper, b. 1845, married Wiley T. Moseley
(6) James Warren Harper, b. 1848, marrried Claudia Moore
(7) Henrietta Louise Harper, b. 1851, married Shadrach I. Wooten
(8) John Franklin Harper, b. 1853, married Lydia Moseley

REVISED NOTE: The preceding note contains the traditional genealogy of James Madison Harper. Recent research, however, has shown that this information is very likely in error. It appears now that James M. Harper's father, Blaney Harper, was NOT the son of Francis Harper, Jr. but rather a younger son of Alexander Harper, who was very likely the uncle of Francis Jr., and thus the brother of Francis Harper, Sr. Alexander, who died around 1782, married Margaret Kilpatrick, daughter of John Kilpatrick and Elizabeth Easley.

James M. Harper died in 1858, but his widow continued to manage the family plantation through the difficult years of the Civil War and Reconstruction. The census of 1860 shows Charlotte Harper and several of her children still living there, along with twenty-eight slaves, several of whom Charlotte had inherited from her father, Jacob Parrott, at the time of his death in 1856.

The first of the following letters was written in March, 1853, to James M. Harper by his oldest son, Francis, at that time a student at a school in Vermont. The second letter was written a few months later by James and Charlotte Harper to the same son, Francis, who wasstill away at school. The final letter was written near the end of the Civil War by Francis Harper from his home in Craven County, to his mother, Charlotte Harper, in Lenoir County. The originals may be found in the F. M. Harper Jr. Papers, P. C. 560.1, North Carolina Archives, Raleigh, NC. Capitalization and
~~~~~~~~~~

punctuation have been added whenever necessary to facilitate reading, but spelling and grammar have not been altered.

~~~~~~~~~~

Bakersfield, Vt.
March 28th, 1853

My Dear Father,

I recieved your letter on Saturday evening stating that you were all well at home which I was glad to hear. I am quite well at presant and have been ever since I wrote to you last.
I expect you are planting corn right away by this time. I guess it looks a good deal like planting in this part of the country and the snow nearly three feet deep!
I rather guess the people would have to plant deeper than they ever have yet to find ground to plant in.
And I suppose you have got brother Jacob plowing this spring. I wonder how he likes it. I fancy I can hear him now, scolding at Nora or threatening to whip Boston if he don't go along.
29th I commenced writing this letter yesterday intending to put it in the office last night but had written but so much when some of the boys came in and said that we were all invited to a sugar party about half a mile from the village. I immediately dropped all and went and staid till ten o'clock and had all the syrup and warm sugar that I could possibly eat. I at first thought I could eat a great deal but I found in trying it that I soon had enough.

I had much rather have a piece of potato pie than to have all the sugar I could eat at presant.
They have a way of fixing it when it is warm which makes it first rate. They take a small quantity of boiling syrup and pour it into a plate of snow which causes it to cool very suddenly and leaves it in the form of wax. It has the appeareance of molasses candy only it has a better flavor.
We are having some beautiful spring weather about now and the snow is melting away very fast but it will have to melt a great deal before it is all gone and very likely we shall have a good many snowstorms yet before the first of May.
I have had an invitation from Mr. Armstrong to go out there some Saturday afternoor when they get to making sugar. I shall probably go next Saturday, if it is a good day.
When I last heard from Miss Armstrong alias Mrs. Shattuck she had reached California on her way to Oregon with her husband. The vessel they were in put in at San Francisco where they were going to stop a while and then
~~~~~~~~~~

proceed to their destination.

The Liquor Law in this state went into operation on the eighth of the presant month and it is working admirably. The rumsellers have nearly all been compelled to relinquich the sale or submit to the loss of their liquor. In some instances they have been known when the officers entered the front door to pour the liquor out at the back door thus saving the fine and costs.

On Saturday evening there was a negro preacher, preached in the town house and the next day he preached in the Methodist Church. This is the second negro that I have seen since I have been in Vermont.

I believe I have written nearly all the news I can think of at presant.

I am well as usual and getting along first rate.

I recieved a letter from cousin Delaney dated Feb. 18th and he said that they were not quite done planting corn.

The people here are astonished to hear of planting corn in February.

I don't know what to say about going home in May. I feel rather inclined to want to stay through the summer, that is if our presant teacher does not leave. If he goes away I think I had better leave too as it would hardly pay very well for me to go to another school for only one term or a part of a term. If you had rather I should come home in the spring I am perfectly willing as I want to go home very bad.

Give my best respects to the little stangers.

Very respectfully your son
F. M. Harper

~~~~~~~~~~

North Carolina
Lenoir Ct.
June 17th 1853

Dear Francis

We received your letter of the first of June and were very glad to hear from you to hear you were well andoing well. We are all (well?) at thiss time, with the exception of a bowel complaint some of us have. You mentioned in your letter of 15th May something about going to Montreal or somewhere in Canida. If you wish to go I am willing you should do so. As regards money I will send you some by Mr. J. J. Armstrong as he expects to go home in July. If you should need any before he gets home you must apply to old Mr. Armstrong and I guess he will let you have what you may need, as Junior (?) has wrote to him about it. You also mentioned you had outgrown your linning coat. If you need clothing you will have to buy such things as you may need for you are two far from home for your mother to send them
~~~~~~~~~~

to you.

Corn and cotton are not as large as it was last year at this tim. We have had such a cold spring everything is moore backward. We are getting along with our crop verry well. We lack about three days work being over the third time. We are engaged in saving our wheat at this time so we cannot commence laying by corn before the twenty second or third but I guess that will be soon enough. We have been pushed up to what we could do but it has been so dry. We have got our crops in good order now Bill ran away on the fourth of April and has not returned yet I am in hopes he will get so well rested he can work when I get him

~~~~~~~~~~

My dear Francis,

Finding your father's letter unfinished and he gone to the fields to take up wheat and thinking he would not have time to finish it, and John has gone to sleep. The rest of the children are well and anxious to see there brother. They are all at home at this time except Eliza. She is going to school in Kinston. We do not know when they will go to school but we are in hopes soon. We could not well spare Jacob now and James goes to the fields as regular as the rest with the exception of staying in the morning, untill after breakfast. Persis and Martha are learning to work this summer. Persis can make a pair of pants with a very little help. Martha has knit three or four pair of socks. Henrietta inquires for you often but allways in connection with Mr. Armstrong and she insists that he will come back when you do and bring some candy. Our folks are all well as I have heard from them all in less than a week. Henrietta and Mary were both at papa's this week. Eunus Mewboorn and Mrs. Becton last Sunday were baptized at Kinston. Jessy More and Debby have joined the church at Kinston. I expect Lem is doing verry well. I have heard he goes to prairs with his family before going to bed. Lem Bird has gone to Alabama. James Parrott has gone to Texas in consequence I understand of some letters that has been sent to Debby Allen. I do think that he and Lem Bird has both acted a little ugly though Debby would be glad to clear James of blame. He went away quite sudenly as his folks knew nothing about it untill that day he left. I neglected to tell you the baby is sick. We think tis the flue but he is better now. I have not time to write more as he has waked up now. So good-by, be a good boy and learn all you can. Your school days are allmost over.

Your mother
Charlotte E. Harper

(The following line is written upside down at the top of the page in what appears to be the handwriting of Charlotte E. Harper: I am glad you worked
~~~~~~~~~~

when you had vacation as the money will be of yuse now and the information hereafter.)

While I was gone to the field to take up wheat your mother has been wrighting and as she has quit without filling up the paper and I am going to Kinston today I must fill it up. We have taken up six stacks of wheat and I think we shal have four moore. I think they will avrage at least twelve bushels and a half per stack at least. If you don't make hast and come home we shall eat up all the peaches and watermellons. Our peach trees are verry full. Our watermellon vines are sorry owing to the coall dry wether. Plumbs are nearly gone. We have corn tassels and silk in the rosten ear patch and Jacob says there are tassels in the field. Our corn will avrage as high as your head and our cotton half leg high. I send you enclosed two dollars which makes sixteen dollars and a half if you get this. I have one moore I will send you one of thes days. I must quit for want of room to wright.

James M. Harper

~~~~~~~~~~

From: Johnsons Mills, N. C.
To: Mrs. Charlotte E. Harper
Feb. 25, 1865
Moseley Hall
Lenoir County

Feby. 15, 1865
Glenwood
Craven County, N. C.

Dear Mother

I have met with an opportunity to send letters to Lenoir & I very gladly avail myself of the presant opportunity. Myself and family are all very well except Alice She met with the luck to get her foot scalded pretty bad a few days ago. She had poured some boiling water in the bucket when Lulu caught hold of the bucket & the bails slipped off & spilt the water on Alice's foot. It blistered on the top of her foot a little larger than a silver dollar. It is doing very well now & I think she will be trotting around in a few days. I let Jim help Lizzie now till Alice gets well. The weather has been so cold & the ground froze so much of the time that I have had only about two days plowing done since I have been home. I have also done about a day's work on the fence. I have done it up from the house along the lane very near to the big gate. The rails are hauled as
~~~~~~~~~~

far round as the branch. Marshal Netherout, who I hired up the country & brought down, does the plowing; Fred hauls rails with the ox cart, & Jim & myself puts up fence. I have been mending up the garden, horse lot, yard, and Irish potato patch part of the time, as well as gate bars etc. to repair. Everything, almost, was flat down when I got here & I haven't near got things straight yet. I spent two days fixing the running gear of my gin, so I can grind corn with my little mill. Mr. Wetherington helped me about it. Marshall and myself had to cut down a big pine & hew a sill to put the wheel up with. It will take another day now to fix the mill down solid so I can grind meal. I can grind homony with it now but it is not fixed down solid enough to grind meal. I brought about a barrel of meal which will last me till March or longer. We also brought a flour barrel full of potatoes but they are just out. It took me all the week till Saturday night the week I left Lenoir to get my things home. I started down here on Wednesday and got to Mr. Leroy Whites next day by twelve o'clock & home that night about sunset. I expected to put my things right across the river but the river was so full I had to carry them two miles up the river in boats & then haul them eight miles home with my wagon and oxcart. It took two loads with each. I got Mr. White to help me get my things across. He had a large canoe that would carry almost a wagon load at one time. Mr. Wetherington helped me with another smaller boat. I had to give Mr. White two & one half bushels of oats, forty-five pounds of flour and one bunch of spun cotton for helping me. I could have carried my things within two miles of my river landing but there was no boat except at the cowpen landing which was below & our pickets are there & as I had no pass to cross the river they might have put me to some trouble. Col. Starr was in command when I passed through Kinston & he said he had no right to pass me below our lines, & so refused to pass me any further than to cross Coward's bridge. If I have anything more brought down that side of the river I want it brought about five miles lower down to Mr. Kit Dudley's which is about two miles above my landing. There is no boat there but as soon as I find out they are there I can get boats & bring them down to my landing. I would like very well to get another load or two brought down. I don't know when I can get up there, times are so squally about now. The Yankees had about six hundred hands about a fortnight cutting cross ties for the railroad but they have stopped now. I understand they have enough to lay the road as far as Kinston. Their trains run every night as far up as Bachelors creek hauling railroad iron. I have not seen any Yankees since I have been here. They came one day while I was in Lenoir. There was about a company of cavalry came up with two of Mr. Wetherington's sons, who are living in the lines. One of them had a bed and some other things here, & when he heard that I had got home, supposing that his plunder would be in my way, he got the Yankees to come up with him after them. Lizzie said the most of them stopped at the ditch bridge about half way the lane while an officer and four or five men came to the house. They only staid

about five minutes loading the things in the cart & leaving as soon as possible. The officer in command asked Lizzie if she had seen any rebel scouts around here lately which was all he said to her. They did not come in the house at all. The Wetheringtons carried the things out to them. They came as far up as Miss Betsey Green's one day since then, but came no further. Our scouts have been to see me several times since I have been here. O'Connor staid all night with me one night & till ten o'clock next day. He went out & helped me burn grass in the field as unconcerned as if there was not a Yankee in a hundred miles. He is a very intelligent man, much more so than I had supposed. The Yankees say it is impossible to kill him, that whenever they shoot at him he turns around & catches the balls in his hands. He stays all night when he is down here with the people & as often with the buffaloes as any one else. He says the Yankess expect nothing better than for the citizens to harbor rebel scouts which I believe is true. I have not made any very definite arrangements yet about getting letters and paper from up there but for the presant you can direct them to Johnson's Mills, Pitt County, in the care of Bishop Dudley & I will get them after a while. Tell Simon to write to me & to come & fetch me a box or two of tobacco & forty or fifty bunches of spun cotton. I swapped off a barrel of pork with Capt. King for 19 bunches of cotton; 15 lbs. for a bunch. I sell it very easily here for twenty lbs. of meat, lard or tallow for a bunch. Tobacco, cotton & salt are in great demand among the citizens down here. My paper is out so I must stop scribbling.

I remain very truly

F. M. Harper

(The following line is written upside down at the top of page 3: Lizzie sends her love to all & says she is better satisfied than she has been since the war, even if she does have to cook & scour & wash. We get Mr. Hill's negro woman to do our heaviest washing.)