

**24 August 1999**

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**Letter 008**

**Dickson, Mrs. Archibald  
(Township of McKillop, Upper Canada)  
to Mr. James Turnbull (her father)  
(Bedrule, Scotland).  
29 September 1834  
&  
Archibald Dickson (from Dundas)  
to Mr. James Turnbull (his father-in-law)  
(Bedrule, Scotland).  
10 October 1834**

NOTE: The location of the original of this letter is not known at present. The letter was printed in the HURON EXPOSITOR of June 10, 1887. It was introduced in this way:

James Dickson Esq., Registrar of Goderich, has very kindly furnished us with an interesting relic in the shape of a letter written by his mother some 53 years ago, shortly after her arrival in this country. It was addressed to her father, "Mr. James Turnbull, Bedrule Manse, near Jedburgh, Scotland." The letter was written on a sheet of foolscap, in a neat, bold hand, and is still in an excellent state of preservation, and the writing quite legible, the ink having scarcely faded away. We publish it in full, together with Mr. Dickson's introductory note to us, and we need not say that it will be read with deep interest by old and young alike. It gives a slight glimpse of the hardships and trials which the brave pioneers of those days so uncomplainingly and cheerfully bore, and while it inspires us of the present day with reverence and love for them, it should give us increased contentment with our lot, surrounded as we are by comforts and pleasures and advantages of which they knew nothing, and scarcely dared dream of attaining. There were, of course, no envelopes in those days, and the sheet is folded, sealed, and addressed on the outside, and we are sure it would sorely puzzle many a one who is considered pretty smart to fold it in such away as to completely conceal all the writing and at the same time have a place for the address, but then as now and ever, "necessity was the mother of invention," and people readily adapted themselves to circumstances.

The correspondence is as follows:

Registry Office, Goderich, June 6th, 1887

Dear Expositor:

On my last visit to Scotland I received from my cousin, Mr. Wm. Turnbull, of Spittal, the enclosed letter. It was written by my mother to her father 53 years ago shortly after her arrival in McKillop. Her dear little Archibald, she mentions, was my youngest brother who died at the age of eighteen months, before reaching Grosse Isle where he was buried. She frequently spoke of

the great kindness shown to her and family by the captain of the ship. Her sister, Betsy, was the wife of Dr. Swan, who a few years afterwards settled where Brucefield now stands. John Govenlock's wife died shortly after reaching her father's house. Her funeral was the first, I believe, in McKillop. It was truly a sad and mournful scene. There was no churchyard there and so she was buried on the bank of the river Maitland, in the deep woods at that time, but now within the orchard of my brother-in-law, Mr. Robert Scott. Mrs. Govenlock was the second daughter of Robert Scott, Sr., and mother of Thomas, Robert, and Andrew Govenlock, Mrs. Wilson of Seaforth, Mrs. Richard Thompson and the late Mrs. Hugh Grieve, of McKillop. The William Riddell referred to was my cousin. What became of him I do not know. You will perceive that the letter was posted in Galt on the 14th of October, 1834, that the postage was paid to New York and cost 2 shillings and 6 pence currency or 56 cents. Please take good care of the letter as I value it highly. When it was written there were only two houses on the north of the river Maitland, in McKillop, that of my father and the late Robert Scott. If you consider it sufficiently interesting please publish it and oblige.

Yours very truly, James Dickson.

*Township of McKillop,  
29 Sept. 1834*

*My Dear Father,*

*I have waited thus long in writing to you in hopes of hearing from my sister Betsy before doing so, but I have not yet heard anything about them except that they intended to settle in a place named Wellington Square, somewhere between York and Hamilton. As I could hear nothing certain about them, I thought it proper to bring the books and parcels from them, up with me, until I know where to send them. I wrote to my brother, from Montreal, an account of the death of my dear little Archibald. This event has left a melancholy depression of spirits, together with parting from loved relations, which I am not likely to overcome soon. I was happy to find James and his father well though looking much thinner than when they went away. Our land, in my opinion, looks well, indeed much better than I expected, and seems to produce abundantly every kind of crop put into it, and our prospects here are certainly very cheering, much more so than we could ever have hoped to have realized had we stayed in Scotland, and we have reason to be glad that we have taken the important step we have done in emigrating to this country, where persevering industry is sure to meet its reward.*

*We have not as much crop this year as will keep the family. We expect, however, to have every common article of food within our own property. A great many things here are nearly double the price I could have purchased them for in Montreal, but I durst not make the purchases I would have made on account of the heavy charge for carriage, which cost me a great deal of money, the last hundred miles no less than 15 pounds Sterling for my family and luggage. I was much disappointed in not meeting James or his father at Montreal, owing to their having never received the letter my brother sent away in the end of May which we expected would reach them in time. Instead of this, we have not heard anything of it this time, which shows how very imperfect the communication is between Britain and Upper Canada, and even after reaching*

*Hamilton it will be a fortnight, as the post only comes up once in that time. A great many settlers have come into this neighbourhood this year, both from Britain and other places in this country, and they all express themselves well-satisfied with the Tract upon seeing it. It is truly astonishing to see how well all seem to suit themselves to the labour and hardships which every new settler has to lay his and her account with for sometime after coming here, and even ladies and gentlemen appear contented and happy in the prospect of future independence.*

*We have no stated minister, and excepting now and then a minister of the Methodist sect, we pass our Sabbaths at home. This I regret very much, both on account of the family and myself. There is, however, to be a meeting of the settlers soon to see what can be done amongst themselves in erecting a church and supporting a minister. There is no teacher in reach for the children to go to, but we will try to manage it within ourselves. That much dreaded pestilence, cholera, has been awfully prevalent in this country, but is now on the decrease. In the course of a few weeks Montreal lost 1,100 of its inhabitants. My dread of it was so great that I dared not go to see the burying ground of St. Ann's as I intended. We left the city on Monday, the 4th of August, for Lachine on board of a Durham boat, to go by way of the St. Lawrence instead of the Rideau Canal [which arrangement was made in John Govenlock's and my absence], as our people had directed us. Our hardships and delay in coming up the river cannot well be described, but there we were exposed to a burning sun through the day and dews so rank through the night that I could almost have wrung our outer clothes in the morning, together with thunder and rain and a boat without any edge to prevent the children from falling over. I suffered more than I can well describe, and it was no small relief to me when we got on board of a steamer which we had all the way from Brockville to Hamilton, and from thence we were brought in wagons, which took us three days, and we had no other covering at night save the shelter of an open barn or shed, so afraid were the people of the cholera that they would not permit us to enter their houses in many places. On the last day of our journey we had a great deal of thunder and rain, which drenched us as completely as if we had been drawn through the river, and made us very glad to get once more into a house we could call our own. We have two oxen and three cows, two of which have calves, and all feed in the woods without a blade of grass and looking quite fat. I understand it is customary in winter to go before them and cut down branches of certain trees on which the cattle feed and look better than at home fed on more expensive keep. Poor John Govenlock lost his youngest child and I shall add the wife of his bosom since coming to this country. His child died at Grosse Isle and his wife just reached her father's house and died three days after, supposed to be of cholera, at least the doctor here says so. He has purchased land a little above us, together with James Grieve who has settled next him; the other men are engaged to work. John Henderson's youngest child died at Montreal. I saw William Riddell at that place; he says he is to enter into partnership on the 1st. of January, but he will be idle until that time, but he talks of his prospects being good. I thought him more thoughtful and thinner than when he went away. He is still as adverse as ever to the farming, I can hear, and talks of people here as binding themselves to perpetual slavery when they purchase bush lots. If my sister would inform Aunt Betty that we have had no word of Peter, and except publishing him in the newspapers we do not know how to find out where he is. The weather since we came has been for the most part warm and pleasant, but occasionally thunder and rain, unaccompanied with the cold that succeeds it at home. The wheat and barley harvest is over, but the oats are still standing. Peggy Scott requests me to say if my sister would write a few lines to Joseph and inform him of the death of his relations and give it in to Scott baker,*

*Jedburgh; also, if she would inform Grieve's and Henderson's people when she sees them that they are all well. Give my kind love to all my relations and kind, enquiring friends. I will write before long to my daughter Helen or one of my sisters. I expect a letter from you as soon as conveniently can. We are all in good health and I have not been better nor slept sounder these many years. I am anxious to hear from you. I remain, my dear father, your affectionate daughter.*  
E. R. T. Dickson

*(Across the face of the first page of the letter was written the following message from Archibald Dickson to his father-in-law)*

*My Dear Sir: I have been down here buying a wagon, which I have got and three cows and a pair of oxen to help pay expenses on the road. I intend taking 200 acres of land for James, tomorrow. The price is now 11 shillings and 3 pence which is a great advance since I bought mine. I have been asking after Swan today being an election for member and I hear he is doing well at Wellington Square. I have no time to write at present, but I intend to write to Mr. Turnbull, Spittal, in a few days. Give my respects to him and family also to Miss Turnbull and I would thank her to send a Kelso paper now and then.*  
*I am, dear sir, yours truly.*

*Archibald Dickson.*

*Dundas, October 10, 1834.*

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