

## 2. John Moves to Richmond

But John finds that New York is "full of gentlemen's sons" looking for work. He, a farmer's son, is advised to try his luck in Richmond, Virginia, and he wastes no time in New York. He left there eight days after arriving, and travelled to Richmond by ship, arriving on 6 August 1817.

Two weeks later he writes to his family that he has found employment "in the counting house of Mr. Samuel Myers, Jun., Mercht." He is soon (letter of 3 October 1817) working instead for "Mr. Muir." He makes \$250 per year, "and found" (including room and board). John never complains of any hardships he encounters, but in all of the letters of the years 1817 and 1818 he implores his family to write more often and to send more news from home. Most of his letters talk about the financial situation (price of crops, etc.) and ask and give news of friends. And soon he is urging his family to send him some capital to help improve his prospects.

On 3 November 1817 he asks his brother to send him some clothes, as "new clothes is very high here, a good coat from 36 to 40 dollars. If you would procure me a good black or blue coat, a few of blue Cassimere pantaloons [trousers] that [fit you] ... and 7-1/6 or 7-1/4 inch hat is my size." He mentions that his friend from Scotland, David Ireland, has "sailed from New York to Huntsville, Mississippi Territory." Several Richmond businesses have failed, with more failures expected. "I hope business is getting brisk in Britain, but I am afraid prices are getting too low, for my Father paying his heavy rent... The fever [yellow fever?] is still raging in Savannah, Charleston and New Orleans."

In December John writes that, more than six months after leaving Scotland, he has finally received (on 29 November 1817) his first letter from home. "I am happy to hear you anticipate an abundant harvest and revival of your mercantile concerns, both of which I hope will be realized at the same time. ... Please say the extent and rent of [brother] William's farm as also his future address. ... I am well content with my present situation until something more lucrative casts up. ... I have got two or three good [situations] here since I came to Mr. Muir" [extra work?].

Joseph has asked about the country, so John tells something of what he has seen, although his interest centers on business and investments.

The greater part of the Tobacco plant comes from the country towards the Eastern shore... The people in general are pretty kind. Great numbers care little about religion, some keep their stores open on Sunday. ... There are believers only of two opinions regarding politics. One is termed Democrats, that is Government party, almost all the natives and Irish take this side. The other is called the Federals ... friends to Great Britain. ... [Most people, except the few who are married] board in hotels, or principal lodging houses. Some pay as high as \$300 per annum, [most pay] \$230 to \$260. ...

... I have received two letters from David Ireland, the first dated Mobile, 24 Sepr. stating that he arrived there after a pleasant passage of twenty-three days from New York [by way of Havana]. He was to sail up the river the next day for Huntsville. ... [In a second letter, this one from Huntsville, dated 31 October, David Ireland wrote me:] 'I am perfectly pleased in coming to this country... [Huntsville] is rising as fast as any town that was ever seen or heard of. Last year about this time, there was not a house except a hut or two, and now it contains three stores.' He says it is a fine healthy country containing the best land in the U.S. and furnishes large quantities of cotton. It was lately purchased from the Indians.

John thinks that David's parents may come from Scotland to join their only son. He also tells his brother about selling his watch "at auction held on board our brig in the midst of the Atlantic, sold at 5 pounds, 5 shillings. I would not have got that for her here." He

begs for news from Kinross, and suggests better methods for dispatching letters. In his earlier letter, of 3 November, John has said that he writes as often as a ship is leaving Richmond for Liverpool or Scotland. Communication overseas was complicated, slow, and expensive. A letter could take more than three months to make the trip from Edinburgh to Richmond. A large part of the space in John's letters of this period is taken up by requests for more frequent letters from his family and suggestions on how best their fastest possible delivery could be arranged.

There are eleven letters to his family in 1818, the first nine from Richmond, the last two from Huntsville, Alabama. The first three letters of 1818 are mostly complaints about not receiving letters from home, and business news (price of tobacco and flour, etc.) He is hurt when "the packet" arrives at Richmond without anything for him from Scotland. In a postscript to his letter of 22 January, one senses his bitter disappointment. "The letters by the British Packet have arrived in town this morning, but bring none for me. At which I am not a little surprised. I think you are very neglectful. I never miss an opportunity to write you."

Again, on 14 February 1818, "The November Packet ... brought not a single word for me, and now the December one has arrived also, and brought as little. I never was so much disappointed in my life, to see every person getting word from their friends, news from their native Country, etc. and nothing of the kind for me..." In this letter John mentions his friend David Ireland again: "Mr. Ireland has obtained a situation in Huntsville and gets \$300 a year and bed, board and washing."

Finally, on 26 March 1818 John writes that he has three days before received a second letter from Joseph, "no less than three months and three days from its date until its arrival in this place." Again, he advises on better methods of sending letters.

He thinks that "the Ministers in this place ... are inferior to those with you. ... An old, unmarried Scotchman is thought to be the best preacher of the whole, ..." but John goes to the Presbyterian Church most Sundays, occasionally to the Episcopal. He has had more letters from David Ireland, telling him of the wonderful opportunities in Huntsville for an ambitious young man. "It is one of the best places in the United States for making money."

On 6 May 1818 John writes of his "joy" in having received another letter, and answers his brother's questions about

... the manner of living here, which ... is better and a great deal dearer than with you. ... I wd. prefer your substantial and plain manner of living to all their Am. luxury. ... We breakfast at 7 [in winter about 8], get dinner about 2 and supper between 7 & 8. ... We have at breakfast cold beef, beef-steaks, or something of the kind and tea or coffee as we choose. At dinner, roast or boiled beef, bacon and greens (which is a great dish in Am.), turkeys and other fowls in their season, with a great many other dishes which I do not remember ... In our boarding house we have nothing but bread and butter and tea for supper, but I understand it is different in others. ... [I think David Ireland, who apparently left Scotland under a cloud] to be a much reformed man from what he was in Kinross...

On 20 June John writes (another letter he wrote on the 19th of May is missing) about business (crops are doing well, tobacco selling higher than last year, etc.).

Farmers here ... are making money fast. ... Taxes are nothing at all compared to those with you. ... Upon the whole I think they make their money a great deal easier than those with you. Their Negroes or slaves have to do everything ... This is the only thing I would not like about farming in Virginia. There are great numbers of these unfortunate beings being purchased at this place just now and carried to Georgia and Louisiana where they are required principally for the cultivation of Cotton, Rice and Sugar.

[Concerning David Ireland]: His father seems sorry at his going to Huntsville, but from every account I can hear he will have no occasion to rue it. ... He likes the country very well; it is healthy and being a newly settled country containing good lands, holds out more advantages to the adventurer than the more populated and earlier settled States...

A long letter of 8 July tells of problems in receiving the clothes sent to him by his brother ("a pair of pantaloons was wanting [had been stolen]"). He tells of the vast amount of money to be made if one has capital to lend. His extreme thrift and frugality is illustrated in this letter:

The rate of interest in America is not limited, banks take 6% but 7, 12 and even 20% is often given and obtained by individuals. ... Money ... is of more value here than with you. A person ... with a few hundred pounds, could make money fast. ... After saving every penny that it was possible to save, I had about \$240 to \$250, \$230 of which I laid out in Muir's hands at interest. I kept the balance for necessaries such as buying shoes, etc.

This year I expect to save about \$300 as I expect my salary to be abt. \$350, \$100 more than [originally expected, because of] Mr. Muir having more employment than one would be expected to perform, but which I accomplish. ... My present time [contract] expires on the 1st proximo, but as I have something in view, I am not sure whether I may stop or not [at a larger salary]. ... Mr. Muir was never better pleased in his life with any person, and altho I say it myself, I know he can say nothing otherwise." He encloses a draft for the six guineas he owed for the clothes, which his next letter (of 28 July 1818) tells fit "very well and I am well pleased with them. Such a coat ... would cost here about 85 Dollars ...

On 17 September 1818 John writes his last letter from Richmond. His contract with Mr. Muir has expired, and he is determined to go to Huntsville, even though Mr. Muir wants him to stay.

...my mind is made up to go to that quarter where I think I will get along better, I will not retract. I am to have immediate employment, ... and my present intention is to take the situation for six months to learn the manners and customs of the people, and [then] to do something for myself, if my small finances will ... allow it. ... If you and my Father ... would assist me with one or two hundred pounds, to help me begin, ... I will allow you 7 or 8% and remit it annually until I pay the principal.

This much detail has been included from the 1817 and 1818 letters because of what they show of John Hardie's character and the life he was leading. He was a hard worker, leading a hard life, which seems to have consisted almost entirely of work. His salary, at first, was \$250 a year, which apparently was increased to \$350. And perhaps he was able to do some outside work for extra money at times. But still it is remarkable that the young man (who had to sell his watch on the voyage from Scotland) managed to save, in the thirteen months after arriving in Richmond, "\$240 or \$250." [We learn in his next letter that it is "nearly \$500." He must have lent his first savings out to his advantage.]

Although brother Joseph evidently has urged him not to make a hurried decision on moving to Huntsville, John has decided to go there. ["My mind is made up ... I will not retract."]