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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE LETTERS OF JOHN PATTERSON, 1812-1813

OF THE DATE and the place of birth of John Patterson no record is obtainable. The Veterans Administration of the War Department, however, does have a certificate stating that on June 20, 1808, at Milton, Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, he married Levina (or Lavina) Allerton. Old War Minor Certificate 880 furnishes the additional information that John Patterson enlisted at Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1812 as a private in Captain Foulk's company in the Twenty-Second Regiment of the United States Infantry, and that while still in service he died at Lewiston, New York, in 1813.

He was survived by his widow and two little children; namely, Mary S., who was born on August 5, 1809, and David, who was born on June 3, 1811, and was probably named for the David Allerton spoken of hereafter. For the benefit of these minor children a pension of five years' half pay in lieu of bounty land was allowed, commencing on February 15, 1815. In 1853 Mrs. Patterson was living in St. Joseph County, Michigan, and was then sixty-one years of age.¹ This scant information leaves us almost wholly uninformed about John Patterson himself.

Since he addressed his letters to his wife, usually in care of her relatives near Meadville in Crawford County, in the northwest corner of Pennsylvania, he must have lived in those regions that had most to fear from incursions of the British and their more dreaded Indian confederates. During his enlistment he was never stationed more than 150 miles from home, according to the last of the letters quoted below.

¹ Walter S. Allerton, *A History of the Allerton Family in the United States, 1585 to 1885, and a Genealogy of the Descendants of Isaac Allerton*, revised and enlarged by Horace True Currier, 46-47 (Chicago, 1900). Here it is stated that "Lavinia" Allerton was born about 1793, and was said to have been married twice, "first to a Mr. Patterson, and second to a Mr. Nash." Amos Allerton, her father, was born in New Jersey in 1760, and was a farmer, tanner, and shoemaker. Early in life he married Chloe Stiles, and they had several children. He is said never to have resided long in one community. He died at Lake Mills, Wisconsin, on September 15, 1846.

For five years all of the Lake Erie region and the thirty-five miles of frontier along the Niagara River from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario was a theater of many stirring scenes. This territory was only sparsely settled. Even Buffalo, established in 1801 by the Holland Land Company and called New Amsterdam, had only about two hundred houses and a military post. Black Rock, Manchester, Fort Niagara, Lewiston, Newark—these names that we see frequently in the accounts of the war represented only scattered hamlets joined by poor roads and solitary farms.

On August 13, 1812, three days before the date of John Patterson's first letter, General Stephen Van Rensselaer arrived at Fort Niagara, the acknowledged strategic center of conflict, and assumed command of the First Division of the Army. The next day he established his headquarters at Lewiston, a near-by village, and sent detachments of militia to all posts along the line of the river. But to guard the whole frontier from threatened invasion there were scarcely a thousand men. There was not a single piece of ordnance heavier than a six-pounder, and for such light field pieces as the army had there were no artillerymen.² There were not ten rounds of ammunition for each soldier. The men had insufficient food and clothing. They clamored for pay and vilified the American government for the rejection of certain British proposals for an armistice. They had scant medical supplies and no tents. Dissatisfaction and actual insubordination prevailed. Hull's failure in July to take Malden, near Detroit, the report that hordes of Indians were arming on the upper lakes under General Brock, and the certainty of the fall of Detroit produced added alarm and distrust of their own chances of success.³

Among the reënforcements being hastened to the Niagara front by stages through wilderness roads was John Patterson. Here follows his first letter:⁴

To Misis Levina Patterson august 16 1812

Dear and loving companion—i take this oppertunity to let you know that i am well at present and i hope that these few lines may find you and all the

² Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, pp. 366n, 381 (New York, 1868); Albert B. Hart, ed., *The American Nation*, 13:95.

³ Captain Robert B. McAfee, in his *History of the Late War in the Western Country*, ch. 2 (1816), gives a full account of the movements of General Hull and of their effects.

⁴ For convenience in reading, this and other letters quoted below are broken by dashes, the originals being largely unpunctuated.

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quireing friends in the same state of helth—i inform you that i do live as well and as easey as i could wish—we purrade twice a day—about 130 men in fort phyatt in pittsburg—i have got two pare of overhols two ruffles shurts a pare of shoes a summer coat and a morning dres—we dress twice a day for common—clean clothes twice a weak a pare of sockes and in a few dayes we shall draw some more clothes—then in the fall we shall draw a coat a wai[s]tcoat a pare of shoes two pare of long storkins two pare of over halls of woolen and a hat a stock and a pare of gaters—i have a blanket and i have receiveed 3:25c in cash and in about 6 weakes i shall have 16 dollers coming to me—then i shall be able to cend some home—there is as much appearance of peace as war at pressent—reading and writeing is my cheapest imployment—on sunday we go to meating to any denomination as we think proper—i was at meating and the love of god come upon me so that I could not contain power—i do not find so much oppesision as i did expect—i have a help mate—and there is about 20 do go to methodist meating—i hope that you will pray for me—and i hope that the friends^s will not dispise you or me because i am a souldier—and i want you to keep out of debt so that when i do return i can have some money to help ourselves—i shall send you some money when ever i have a chance and have it) direct your letter this) alagany county state of pensylvana pittsburg office august 19

John Patterson

send a letter as quick as you can

The second letter, written on September 12 and received eight days later, is not so long as the first. It follows:

To Levina Patterson

Dear and loveing companion—i take this oppertunity to inform you that i am well at present and i hope that these few lines may find you i[n] the same state of helth—and i shall come and see you as soon as i can—you did blame me becose i did not come with cook but i had no money and thea would let so many on furlow at once so far—cook's wife was not in a ———[?] condition was the reson of his comeing—so dont blame me for not comeing or think i dont care for you for i do think as much of you as ever i did and do expect to [do] as well as i can for you and myself—so remain in the cause of god and bee contented—and i hope that we shall enjoy each other again in love—bee not cast down—live cheerfull—you can preserve us both from harme—this from your loveing companion—do not send me a letter till i do send another—there is part to you in the letter your father got to you

John Patterson September. 12. 1812

On the very day before Hull's disconcerting surrender of Detroit, General Henry Dearborn, commander of the northern division of the United States Army, wrote to Secretary of War Eustis that if troops were at once pushed on from the southward, he expected to be able to take

^s Probably he referred to his Quaker neighbors, members of the Society of Friends.

Montreal and Upper Canada before winter set in. "If the Governor of Pennsylvania turns out two thousand good militia from the northwestern frontier of his state, as I have requested him to do . . . I am persuaded we may act with effect on the several points in the month of October at the farthest."⁶

But in New York and New England there was decided resistance to the war.⁷ On August 31 General Van Rensselaer wrote from the line to Governor Tompkins of New York: "Alarm pervades the country, and distrust among the troops. They are incessantly pressing for furloughs under every possible pretence. Many are without shoes; all are clamorous for pay; many are sick. . . . While we are thus growing weaker, our enemy is growing stronger. . . . They are fortifying almost every prominent point from Fort Erie to Fort George. At present we rest upon the armistice, but should hostilities be recommenced, I must immediately change my position. I have no reinforcements of men, no ordnance or munitions of war."

To this letter General Dearborn himself replied from Plattsburg on September 2, in terms no less grave, advising Van Rensselaer "to be prepared to make good a secure retreat as a last resort." Van Rensselaer had only 1,600 militia at Plattsburg, on Lake Champlain, or under marching orders there. Dearborn had 5,000 troops, more than half of them regulars. Six thousand, including three regular regiments from the southward, were destined for Niagara. With these came John Patterson.

How slowly the troops moved! While the reaction from the loss of Detroit was still strong, orders came for the deflection of ordnance and supplies to Buffalo for creating fleets on Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. And still the War Department hoped that the forces would be able to act, though late—too late, Dearborn feared. "A strange fatality seems to have pervaded the whole arrangement," he wrote on September 26. "At all events we must calculate on possessing Upper Canada before winter."

John Patterson, on the way to the front, wrote again, this time without address for a reply:

⁶ Lossing, 384 ff. Note especially the quotations from War Department manuscripts.
⁷ *Chronicles of America*, 17:7-8; Lossing, 384.

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Levina Patterson

I inform you that i am well at preasant and i hope that these few lines will find you in the same state of helth—and i inform you that we arived at carlile the 28 of September—and we do expect to march to niagary falls the 3 of October and i shall try to git a furlow and come home this winter—and i pray you bee of good chear and pray god to bee your guid[e]—i bee well—i am respected among souldiers and officers—we are a going [to] Join ginerall dear burn and he has 60 thousand now—and you need not send me a letter till i do send you another—i have got my second bounty and i send you 3 dollers—and i want some [?] to by a bible a hymn book and some for my Journey—i have 10 dollers to come yet and then i shall try to send you some more as soon as i git it—and i hope that you are a doing well and comfort yourself as well as you can in the fear of god—and may the hand of god bring us both together in love and in the fear of him that presearves both soul and body—and i have cloths as many as i do know what to do with from top too to. So i commend you to god and all the followers to christ—and bare the cross—go on—by the grace of god ile meat you on the banks of everlasting deliverance—so no more at present but my Love to you and all inquireing friends

John Patterson

october. 3. 1812

The entrance into Canada was further delayed when Major General Van Rensselaer of the United States Militia and Brigadier General Alexander Smyth of the United States Army disagreed as to the place of crossing.⁸ A series of disappointments followed. Van Rensselaer fixed the night of October 10 and marched a detachment to the river, only to be prevented by a severe storm and a blunder about the boats. Again, three days later one body embarked and engaged fatally without being joined by others whom they expected to arrive. More unfortunate even than Hull, Van Rensselaer resigned and Smyth took the entire command.⁹ Smyth sent an immediate call for reënforcements from New York and repeated the call on November 17. Two days later Dearborn joined his forces with those of General Bloomfield at Plattsburg and marched twenty miles to the Canadian line, where the militia refused to go farther. Early on November 28 twelve hundred men, ready with

⁸ Lossing, 389-392; Edward Channing, *A History of the United States*, 14:475 (New York, 1926); *Chronicles of America*, 17:6. According to the last-named account, "The perilous fallacy persisted that the States should retain control of their several militia forces in time of war and deny final authority to the Federal Government."

⁹ Lossing, 410.

artillery to cross at Black Rock, waited in vain for eighteen hundred more until late in the afternoon. Such confusion, inefficiency, and disorder became grotesque. General Dearborn, old and discouraged, wrote to President Madison asking permission to retire to private life.

Meanwhile the British in Newark across from Fort Niagara had grown impatient of delay, and early on the morning of November 21 from behind the breastwork their mortars and battery cannon began a fierce bombardment across the river. This lasted all day. The American garrison was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George McFeely of the Twenty-Second Regiment of Infantry—John Patterson's own. During the day a twelve-pounder in Fort Niagara burst and caused the loss of two men. Two others were killed by the enemy, and three more were wounded.

Of this first experience in fighting John Patterson wrote in his next letter:

To Mrs. Levina Patterson

I inform you that i am well at present and i hope that these few lines may find you in the same state of helth—October 5 we left Carlisle for niagary—we came through northumberland milton pensborough williamspport block house painted post big tree so to flint hill with in 3 miles of buffalow—arrived the 1 of novm and stayd there 9 days—on the 10 started again to black [?] rock fort stashen [?] and stayd 1 day and arived on the 15 in fort niagary—the night of the 17 there [were] two men disarted from fort george to us. Nov. 21 about sun rise the british fired over at us and we returned fire—so fought till sun down a forth full¹⁰ streem of canonballs—we had 2 cild and 2 wounded—a canon busted and cild 2 and we saw 6 carryed away at one shot on the other cide—the seign loket awful¹¹ but i was with out fear—i hear that georg casada and jacob allerton¹² is at buffalow with in 30 miles of me—I am in hopes i shall come to see you about new year—at flint hill we received ower winter dres two stockens two over hols a coat turnd up with green cuffs and cholour and 31 butons and one shurt—and i got in to bee waitor at pensborough and am now in the cuntary taking care of the quarter master that was wounded—and i want you to send me a letter as soon as you can how you are a comeing on—direct your letters this . niagary county portor township state of new york niagary post office—I have had an invitation to hold meatings in camp by the oficers and i am at a stand what to do—i feal a nead of a double.

¹⁰ Forceful.

¹¹ The scene looked awful.

¹² Allerton, 47. Jacob Allerton, a lumberman, born in 1790, seems to have been a cousin of John Patterson's wife.

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June

watch—and i hope that i shall find you in the flameing path to heaven—So no more at present but my love to you and all inquireing friends

John Patterson

November. 26. 1812

As winter halted all operations, the men in camp remained restless and discontented, and illness was increasingly prevalent. Every soldier longed to spend this period of inactivity and deprivation at home. The pathos of John Patterson's failure to obtain a furlough is heightened by the fact that men from Meadville who were stationed near did not come to see him. In his letters there is no complaint that money long due him for service had not been paid. Not all were that patient; the six men who deserted from Little York on the other side probably were welcomed to fill gaps on this side of the river. There was little action; but "thea burnt our ospittle"; and on December 10 the beautiful Canadian village of Newark was burned by the Americans.¹³ In this affair General McClure is said to have given the helpless inhabitants but scant time to flee from their homes into the cruel winter wilderness. John Patterson tacitly pities those "thousand soules" that could not escape. Retaliation was terrible; the entire Niagara front was immediately laid desolate.

John Patterson's fifth and sixth letters follow:

To Misis Levina Patterson

I in form you that i am wel at present and i hope that you are all in the same state of helth—the 15 of decm i was takeing sick and was sick for 2 weakes but was vary well attended—dec 1 1812 there was 6 men disarted acros the lake from little york—feb 15 18[1]3 the british give up 13 of our men from fort george to fort niagary—i saw david on our march at pensborough and he informed me that you was well and i was in form'd that george cascada and jacob alerton was at buffalow within 28 miles of fort niagary—i think he might a come and see me—there was john casada—we was both in the battle to gether and he is here yet well and in good helth and is glad to here where his brother is—he inlisted in the geneseo [?]—and if we can git a furlow we will come to see you—i have a bout 20 dollows due to me—we shot not les then a thousand soules in the houses in the town of newark—we burnt their [illegible word] house and set their garisson on fire a number of times and cild considerable of them—thea burnt our ospittle—we have a considerable of sickness in our fort—i saw as much as 50 that was buryed in a bout 6 weakes. Address to george casada from his brother—if he should by chance to dye or git cild in the service george is to have his land and mony if there bee any comeing—and

¹³ Lossing, 632, 633n.

he wants george to come and see him for he does expect to go in the spring on board a manawar on the lake ontary, that thea may fix buyings—he has been in two battles—we sunk a small vessel for the british that day and cild a number of their men—I have been looking for a letter this considerable time—I put 3 dollars in a letter at carlile and give david¹⁴ 5 more at pensborough for you and when i draw i will try to git some more to you—so no more at present but my love to you all

John Patterson January 20. 1813

his love to his friends

To Levina Patterson—i inform you that i am well at present and i hope that you are in the same state of helth—like wise john casaday is well—and i have heard nothing from you sence i saw david at pensborough—this is the forth letter sence i have been at niagary and i want to hear from home and how you are—there is nothing extrordnary happenend lately—I hold meatings twice a weake and i do expect to have some progress in geting hearers—and i hope that you are a gaining ground to canaan—i have not heard a searmon sence i left pittsburg—and i do not know when i can come home—i sometimes think i will send to the secatary of war for a purmetion to preach to the army and do no duty nor fiteing—i wish you would send me a letter—d[i]rect it this X Niagary fort twenty second ridgement commanded by curnal Mcfeally commander X

John Patterson 1813 february 18

i did not send this as soon as i did expect—i wrote more February 20—i received an axident by my own guns going off—we had two alarmes the night of the 19teanth—as i was d[r]awing my lode in the morning some powder lay on the flower—my gun lock was over it—a man threw a cole of fire on the powder and it went off—the rammer and 2 buckshot the wad and the lode of powder went bee tween my forefingor and the middle by the root and cut them apart—did not brake the bone—burnt both hands a little—i preacht the next nite to a vary atte[n]tive congagation

In the midst of this inactivity plans were being made for three simultaneous campaigns in the spring: on the Virginia coast, on the shore of Lake Ontario, and in the valley of the Maumee in Ohio. General Harrison himself camped near the rapids of the Maumee in order to keep open communications with Ohio and Kentucky, to be near the Lake Erie settlements, and to be able to move as early as possible against the British at Detroit and Malden.¹⁶ Only one attempt was made in the

¹⁴ Allerton, 47. David Allerton, born in 1790, was a brother of John Patterson's wife.

¹⁵ Floor.

¹⁶ A lengthy firsthand account of the plans and activities of Harrison at this time may be found in McAfee, 185 ff.

winter, when an unsuccessful contingent of only 170 men was sent by sleigh to surprise Malden while the British vessels were frozen in harbor. That Malden was a key point had always been evident, and on the eastern front rumors were frequently rife that it had fallen. The untimely celebration described in John Patterson's seventh letter shows how welcome such rumors were, and how eagerly the soldiers, restless and ailing in camp, turned their tired eyes toward seedtime on their newly made farms on the edge of the forest.

The following letter was to be left "at Henry Husts" in Meadville—an indication of the writer's fear concerning the whereabouts of his family; for only once since his enlistment had word come to him directly from his wife, and no word at all in eight long months. His formal greeting is not to be censured too severely, nor the brevity of the following unsigned letter of a man who was ill and lonely:

To Mises Levina Patterson

I in form you that i am well at present and i hope that you are in the same state of helth—and john casaday is all so well and in good helth and would be glad to see his brother and david—and i do hope that they will come and see us—i have took up the cross and do preach twice a weak to the souldiers and have vary good attention paid—and i do in tend to do my macors will and pursue plan[s] indevering to save souls—the word does have some afect on some—the british give up 16 of our men on the 7 of february 1813—january we aluminated our windows with a bout 250 candles i hearing that harrison had takeng maldon—the evening following the british give up 30 of our men—the 9[th] 21 one more—the [10] about 200 hundred—and the 11[th] we do expect about 200 hundred more—and i hope that you will pray for me that i may hold fast where in i have beegun that the work of grace [m]ay abound throu the land of our nation—i have not time to [write?] much but my love to you all

The final letter is a desperate plea for word from his wife. Real fear is couched in the inquiry whether "the good ould gentlman does live where he did," and the plain soldier has even besought his colonel to allow his mail to be sent under the protection of his officer's address. Again, and for the last time, John Patterson sends his love to his dear ones. That they received this final word is known. If it were only known that he received at least one of the fond messages that unquestionably responded to the appeal of a good man's heart!

June 19

To Mrs Levina Patterson

I in form you that i am well [at] present and i hope that you are all well at present—i in form you that i have wrote six letters to you and received none and i have wrote 8 letters sence i inlisted and received but one at pittsburg—i wrote one at carlile and put a three doller bill in it—i wrote 2 at pitt—and this makes six at niagary and received none but the one at pitt—and i do beegin to think hard of it—i do some times think you have for got me or do not care any more about me—i dont think i shall write you till i receive one—but if you have forgot me i hope that you have not forgot god—i am not with the company nor in the fort—there is a few about 5 miles from the fort—21 one to make 6 boats and 10 to stand guard—i am one of the guard—and spend the most of my time reading and writeing in the day and stand guard every night two owirs and a half each night—my fellow souldiers receive letters from 50 to 6 or 7 hundred miles all most every weak and i receive none and am so near home—about 150 miles—and i hope that you will write to me how you are and all the rest and whether the good ould gentleman does live where he did and wheather david is married yet—i saw him at pensborough on march and give him 5 dollers for you—i have 50 dollers due me and do expect to draw soon—we do see and hear of from 6 to 40 disarters from the british in a day and they bring in good tidings from the other side—so no mo[re] at present but my love to you all—direct your letters new york fort niagary in the cear of curnal Mcfealley

John Patterson

April 25 1813

As the seal of this letter was broken, there fell out another paper, an attempt to put into verse the writer's religious feelings, in which he had penned the prophetic line, "I'me bordering on the stream of time." A note adds: "Written the 25 1813 april—composed on the bank of the river St Larence where i am now a standing guard five miles out of the fort in sight of the british farmes and their buildings."

In the collection are a few other small papers. A letter from Youngstown, Ohio, dated June 29, 1816, is an offer to assist Mrs. Patterson and her children to obtain five years' half-pay and bounty land. There is also a minister's tiny certificate of the marriage of John and Levina Patterson. And there is a receipt dated January 3, 1818, made to Levina Patterson for nine dollers and fifty-three cents paid to David Parks¹⁷ on a note against David Allerton.

John Patterson did not live to learn of Major Croghan's gallant defence of Fort Meigs on August 3; nor of Commodore Perry's victory on

¹⁷ Allerton, 44. David Allerton Parks seems to have been Mrs. Patterson's cousin.

September 10, which was to halt the whole of the British activities until the defeat of Proctor and Tecumseh at the Thames led to the destruction of the dread Indian confederacy. Nor did he live to know of Jackson's victory at New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent. Such news must have been welcome to his impoverished comrades who still held the Niagara front, as the end of any fear of British dominion. A commonwealth organized less than two score years before, a formless and largely unpenetrated domain, belonging only potentially as yet to humble men who always dwelt in danger—that is what John Patterson and other men like him preserved for a progress of freedom that was to be both orderly and monumental.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

FLORENCE and MARY HOWARD

PENNSYLVANIA IN 1786

An Account of the progress of Population, Agriculture, Manners and Government in PENNSYLVANIA, in a letter from a citizen of Pennsylvania [Dr. Benjamin Rush], to his friend in England. (*Columbian Magazine or Monthly Miscellany*, Philadelphia, 1:117-122—November, 1786.)

SIR:

WHATEVER tends to unfold *facts* in the history of the human species, must be interesting to a curious enquirer.—The manner of settling a new country, exhibits a view of the human mind so foreign to the views of it which have been taken for many centuries in Europe, that I flatter myself the following account of the progress of population, agriculture, manners, and government in Pennsylvania will be acceptable to you. I have chosen to confine myself in the present letter to Pennsylvania only, that all the information I shall give you may be derived from my own knowledge and observations.

The *first* settler in the woods is generally a man who has outlived his credit or fortune in the cultivated parts of the State. His time for migrating is in the month of April. His first object is to build a small cabin of rough logs for himself and family. The floor of this cabin is of earth, the roof is of split logs—the light is received through the door, and, in some instances, thro' a small window made of greased paper. A coarser building adjoining this cabin affords a shelter to a cow, and pair of poor horses. The labor of erecting these buildings is succeeded by killing the trees on a few acres of ground near his cabin; this is done by cutting a circle round the trees, two or three feet from the ground. The ground around these trees is then ploughed and Indian-corn planted in it. The season for planting this grain is about the 20th of May—It grows generally on new ground with but little cultivation, and yields in the