

## **Old McFarland Letters**

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June 4, 2008

Letter from Martha E "Mart" McFarland (1843-1921) to her brother Andrew W. "Mac" McFarland (1835-1905) who had moved to Humboldt County, Iowa many years earlier:

Bovina, NY  
Oct 2d, 1872

Dear Brother,

As I received a letter from you about two weeks ago and prefer to do the scolding to be scolded I thought best answer before you had any reason to retaliate and to commence as our grandmother did with the health of the family: miserable. I thank you but I hope not dangerous. Mother, Eliz and myself are afflicted with bad colds. Theirs appears to be more in their lungs: cough a great deal but are rather better than they have been; mine has settled in the point of my nose in fact it is in a state of chronic scab. But have commenced to dose it with castor oil so reckon I will fetch it to terms.

We are having our pleasant autumn weather a good deal of rain but have not had frost enough to injure our most tender plants. In fact it has been a splendid fall. I don't think I ever seen as many ripe tomatoes in my life and other tender vegetables. We had a hail-storm this day the first this season. But was not enough to hurt anything.

The men are very busy building that barn cellar. I wish it was well over the whole thing as I dread the hard work for them: their hired man is to come on and begin next Monday. Hired help is a scarce article in this part of the country. Almost every one is above that. And the foreigners are not plenty very far from the R. R. and I hope they never may be for the depredations they commit are perfectly horrible.

I suppose you will have seen by the Mirror before you receive this Uncle Jimmie's death, if not he died two weeks ago this day. I could almost say as his son Jim said about Margaret but believe in every one exercising their own judgment about their Dr. and theirs if they have any is certainly fated to themselves. I think had old Dr. Scott and his books all sank in the ocean coming to America it would have been a blessing to them all. The old lady's health is very poor but she takes his death very philosophical. But you know he never was anything but an old pest, to let her tell the story. She is a miserable old woman money has been her God all her life and I fear will continue to be so as long as she can breathe. Uncle Jimmie disposed of all his property before his death. Report says he did not leave his son Jimmy one cent and Mrs. McFadden's girl just \$100. About \$1400 to the Mission and Bible Societies and I don't know who gets the rest but expect David and those boys. Aunt Bettie says Jimmy shall have hers so he will probably get as much as he deserves. I would not be surprised to see him out here before long. I was very sorry to hear such an account of Cousin [Kit's?] health [but?] without her former spirits will not be [????]. She was very anxious to go west thought if she got there would not have anything to do and I have since heard was just as anxious to return east. But Smith said to ma'am: here she was and here she could stay. I don't vouch for the truth of it but it came from the relations so I presume it was so. For if she has not got a more contented disposition [???] for [??ly] Paradise would not satisfy her. As for Uncle Dave I expect he was getting his most pompous speech ready and taking an inventory of your clothes as that was what he always judged a man by so did not look at your face and of course did not know you. But seriously the last time. But I must stop and leave the rest till next time for my paper is full and this is an abominable old pen and I am too lazy to go upstairs and get another. Give my love to Cynthia and the olive branch and accept a good share yourself.

Good bye

Yours as ever,  
Mart

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Names mentioned in this letter:

Eliz = Martha and A. W.'s sister Elizabeth McFarland

Uncle Jimmie = James Thomson Sr., brother of Martha and A.W.'s mother Mary Thomson McFarland.

Aunt Bettie = Elizabeth Scott Thomson

Jimmy = James Thomson Jr.

Margaret = Probably Martha and A. W.'s maternal grandmother Margaret Blythe Thomson?

Dr. Scott = Apparently Jimmie's father-in-law Adam Scott or some other member of the Scott family (have not researched this yet).

Mrs. McFadden's girl = Unknown, perhaps a servant?

David / Uncle Dave and the boys = Paternal uncle David Black (married to Margaret Thomson) and sons James and William.

Cousin Kit(?) / Smith: Probably cousins on the Thomson side. Old family pictures indicate some of the Thomsons apparently went all the way to California.

Cynthia = Cynthia Franklin McFarland, wife of A. W.

Letter from Elizabeth "Libe" McFarland (1830-1913) who had left Bovina to work in New York City, to her brother Andrew W. "Mac" McFarland (1835-1905) who had moved to Humboldt County, Iowa some years earlier:

Jersey City, Feb 13<sup>th</sup> 1873

Dear Brother,

As I am indebted one letter to you I thought this evening I would try to cancel the debt... We are all keeping on the gain [or] Mate is she does not go out much yet she has not been across the river this year but does the most of the house work and serves some of the rest of your friends here are all in their usual health as far as we know. I was over to the city this day and called at Aunt Mart's they were well. Polly is home most of the time this winter and I can see them all fail although they are not very willing to own it but age will tell whether we will or not. Dave was here Monday he said Willie was not home yet. I suppose Mide wrote you Mary's father is dead they took Will when they went to the funeral and his mother and him staid. Mary came home a week ago this day but I suppose sonny was not ready to come home and his sickness did not improve his temper any. Dave has been busy for the past three weeks as discharging clerk on a vessel for the owner he said the other day he was trying to get on a new line of steamers that are about starting if he could get it, it pays well and he would do better and be out of a good deal of bad company. We got a letter from home this afternoon with the welcome news that Father was able to be out doors and chopping again he was pretty bad off for about a week but he won't rest a moment more than he can help. I fear he will lay himself up before they get the barn built. James had been looking for a hired man but had not got one they are a scarce article around there. Mother was not very well Mart said they thought it was the cold James and Mary has both had bad colds and Mother was taken as they had been there is a good deal of sickness and death up there this winter especially among elderly people. John Scott was buried last Saturday his disease was inflammation of the bowels he had always been very healthy and it takes a severer hold of those. I suppose you will have heard of Aunt Nannie Thomson's death but that was one they might have looked for at any time as the old lady has not been able to set up much of the time in a couple of years but the girls will miss her very much as they thought so much of her made as much of her as if she had been and infant. Mart said David Black told them at the funeral that Aunt Betty was very poorly again she stands a great deal so I thought when Uncle Jimmy died she would not stand it long and she has been as smart since as she had been in years. Mide had a letter from Jane last week she said she was quite smart also the little hopeful she does not say but I suppose it's like everyone else the greatest baby that ever was as its hers.

Mide also had a letter from Cynthia one day last week she seems to be concerned about a cough you have why don't you tell us of your troubles when you write. I hope it's only a cold but if it does not leave you when the spring opens you best come home the journey will most likely break it up as like the man consumption does not belong to our family we are having a regular old fashioned winter here the sleighs have been in constant use since Christmas and will be for some time to come from appearances as there was near a foot of snow fell night before last and it keeps so cold all the time it don't thaw. Mide has just been round to see Mrs. Elder she does not seem to gain much they have taken her to her sister's but I will close this epistle as I have nothing to write that will be of interest to you. Mate and Mide join me in love to you and the rest of your family write soon and be sure to say how your cough is as it may proceed from your last fall's hurt I remain your affectionate sister

E. McFarland

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Names mentioned in this letter:

Mate/Mart = Presumably Martha Ann McFarland, A.W. and Elizabeth's sister.

Aunt Mart = Paternal aunt Martha McFarland (1801-1883), who lived the later years of her life in New York City.

Polly = Possibly paternal aunt Mary McFarland (1797-1890), who lived in Bovina (Polly was a very common nickname for Mary in the 1800s).

David Black/Dave/Willie = Maternal uncle David Black (1824-1883), married to Margaret Thomson, had sons Rev. James and William.

Mary's father/Sonny = Unknown

Father = Thomas W. McFarland (1799-1881), A. W. and Elizabeth's father.

James = James T. McFarland (1832-1917), A. W. and Elizabeth's only brother.

Mother = Mary Thomson McFarland (1805-1884), A. W. and Elizabeth's mother.

Mary = Mary C McFarland (1837-1921), A. W. and Elizabeth's sister.

John Scott = Possibly John Scott b. 1797, related by marriage.

Aunt Nannie Thomson/the girls = Possibly Nancy Russell Thomson (7/31/1780-1/31/1873), related by marriage. She had at least three daughters who lived to adulthood.

Aunt Betty = Elizabeth Scott Thomson, whose husband James "Jimmy" Thomson had died about 5 months earlier.

Jane = Jane Ann McFarland Bouton, A. W. and Elizabeth's sister, who had just delivered her first child Mary the previous month.

Cynthia = A. W.'s wife Cynthia Franklin McFarland.

Mrs. Elder = Unknown, probably a family friend.

Mide = Margaret McFarland, A. W. and Elizabeth's sister.

Letter from James T. McFarland (1832-1917) to his brother Andrew W. "Mac" McFarland (1835-1905) who had moved to Humboldt County, Iowa many years earlier:

Bovina, Apr 12<sup>th</sup> 1896

Dear Brother,

Yours of March 16 was received but I was just too lazy to answer then and consequently is not answered yet from the third till the 25<sup>th</sup> of March I done nothing that I could avoid then I went to work but was weak as a string of suckers but am all right now. Mary and Mart also Mide and Eliz are getting along tolerably well. Mart came home the 27<sup>th</sup>. Eliz was then so that she could go out on the street if she wanted to. Mide was weaker but writes they are gaining. Their address is 159 West 15<sup>th</sup> St., New York City.

We boiled our first sap yesterday tapped the day before don't think will have much as the frost is all out of the ground in the woods but we will get enough for molasses & if it had not been for that would not have tapped as we can buy sugar cheaper than we make it. You say times are hard I never seen anything like it. Farmers have been keeping more stock than their farms would support & buying western grain to keep them & when butter got down to 15 cents their butter would not pay their feed bills & that can't go on very long. The result is about three out of 4 have put an improvement on their farms in the shape of a mortgage till it would take \$20,000 to pay the indebtedness in this school district & it is generally the same all over the country it is not safe to lend a man money unless son mortgage & then you want examine the records carefully & not take more than half the value or you will be liable to get the property & there is no sale for farms. There is three farms above here there is no one living on & the man that is on Rob Mc's old farm say he don't think he will stay longer than the first of May. Butter is only worth 16 cents now so you can see farmers are not having much of a picknick but we have always managed to make a living & a little more a man that has money to loan is the man that they all want to see but this won't interest you but will show you that you don't have all of the hard times. Jane's son James was over here a week ago last night & to day they were all about their usual and he said that lots of the farmers was out of hay but grain is cheap or their stock would starve but still they keep on bringing in western horses & sell at auction at an average of about \$60 but as I have no news that will interest you will close with love & best wishes to all.

J. T. McFarland

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Names mentioned in this letter:

Mary, Mart (Martha), Mide (Margaret), Eliz, Jane = James and A. W.'s 5 sisters

Rob Mc = probably their late great-uncle Robert McFarland Sr. who died in 1859? This farm is no longer standing and the property is overgrown with trees.

Jane's son James = James M. Bouton Sr. (1875-1963)