



Carswell Connection

Letter from Allan Carswell to John Gibson 27 December 1854

Submitted by Alex Eastwood - alexeast@magma.ca

This letter, from Allan Carswell to John Gibson, passed down through the Gibson family to Ms. Anne Sheppard, a gr-gr-granddaughter of the recipient living in England. In 1992, Ms. Sheppard noticed in a Dumfries and Galloway Family History Society booklet a query about the Carswell family submitted by Frederick W. Carswell of Ste. Anne de Bellevue, PQ. She wrote to Fred and they established, with a high degree of certainty, that Allan was the youngest son of Thomas and Janet (Sloan) Carswell, born on a farm in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, on 25 November 1795. They also determined that John Gibson was about seventeen years senior to Allan, and lived throughout his life on a neighbouring farm.

The letter was written with ink on both sides of two sheets of paper, and was folded several times. Allan wrote in a strong, clear hand, but because the writing on one side now shows through to the other and creases obscure it in places, some of the text is almost unreadable. What follows is a combined effort by Ms. Sheppard, s daughter working from the original, and Fred Carswell and myself working from Xerox copies.

Worcester Otsego County 27th Dec 1854

Dear John Gibson.

I write you for the first time this long promised letter but you know I am a man of many sins. I acknowledge I have been ungreatfull but I know your goodness of heart to forgive me as this leaves us all in good health hoping it will find you all enjoying the same blessing. You will like to know how we all got along.

I Bought this farm 4 years ago. I have 50 ackers of land all clear of wood and stumps except 7 or 8 ackers of wood to keep us in fire and other farm purposes. I paid 1000 dollars for it. I paid 500 dollars down and got 5 years to pay the rest. I have paid 400 dollars since and I think in another year will be able to pay the rest. The land is pretty good but sore worn out. It will take me 4 or 5 years yet to put it in some condition. Its something like the land on Killiming(?) full of ____ slaty stones. I have taken off several hundred loads of them and as many more to take off.

We keep 4 cows and 5 or 6 younger catel and 2 horses. I paid 90 for one horse and 93 dollars for the other. They ar now 5 years old. I think I could sell them now for 300 dollars easy. One is A powerful strong hors 16 hands 2 inches high, the other not so heavy but as handsome. I dont think you have any better in Southwick. I got them 2 years ago. The cows cost about 28 dollars each. There is 100 cents

in the dollar. A cent is about the same value as a British halfpenny. There is 12½ cents in our shilling and 8 shillings in the dollar.

We live 50 miles from Albany, straight west. Albany is 150 miles from New York, straight north. Albany is our best market here for our produce. It takes us about 4 days come and go. We have about 40 miles of plank road which is excellent but we will have a railroad in a few years. They began working upon it last winter but the contractor broke down. They have stopped at present for want of money but when they will commence again I don't know. It comes past within a mile and a half of us so you see if once the road is made we can go to Albany in 2 hours.

Everything is high here at present: flour is 10 to 11 dollars per Barrel 296 lb, oats 50 to 55 cents per Bushel, Barley from 10 to 12 shillings per Bushel, rye the same, corn Indian 90 cents to 1 dollar, Butter 18 to 25 cents per pound, eggs 15 to 18 cents per dozen, dead swine 6½ dollars per 100 lb, Beef will range from 6 to 15 cents per lb according to quality, mutton much the same.

Men for working upon a farm will get from 90 to 100 dollars a year with Board, but there is not a farmer in twenty keeps a hired man in winter. The way they generally do, they hire them from the first of April to the first of November at the rate of 10-12 dollars per month but remember these are the highest wages. There is plenty of men to be got from 7 to 8 to 9 dollars per month, but remember these are the highest wages. There is plenty of men to be got from 8 to 9 dollars per month. When I lived at Albany I could get plenty of Irishmen for 4 to 5 dollars in winter per month and sometimes I could get them 3 or 4 months in winter for their Board, but a good tradesman will do better. They will get 10 shillings to 2 dollars per day such as Blacksmiths, Carpenters of all kinds, masons of all kinds and many other kinds too numerous to mention. They could better their circumstances if sober and steady and industrious. Servant girls will get 3 to 6 to 7 dollars per month according to goodness but there is thousands of Irish and Dutch girls that can't get places at all but the Scotch and English are better liked especially if they are good looking. But I see by the New York papers that work is very scarce. At present in all the States a great many people are out of employ for want of money to pay them with.

You will like to know how the farmer gets along. If you can believe me I have seen more distress amongst farmers here than ever I saw in Scotland but there is a cause for it. There is not one farmer in 10 has got his farm clear of debt they are mostly all poor when they commence, they mortgage the farm at 7% for every 100 dollars ^ so with paying the servants + the interest on their mortgage the one half of them can scarcely get along at all but they are ___ poor farmers. To describe them would take me a long time, they plough + crop one field every year as long as anything will grow and their dung will be lying round the stables for years but if they get 10 or 12 bushels per acre they are pleased. I have been trying to buy dung from my neighbours but they won't sell they are always going to lay it on their ground, but never gets it done ^ and as for these ploughmen they are wretched bad.

I must now say something about my family. Janet + her husband live in Jersey City, they are doing well and getting richer every day. I believe his property will be worth 12 or 13 thousand dollars and every year he is making it better. Eliza + her husband lives in Jersey too he keeps a butter + cheese shop + and I am told he is very rich, perhaps worth more than 30000 dollars. Both Janet and Eliza have gotten gold watches so you see they are just about as big as Lady Kirk. Margaret's husband died about 2 months ago and she is now stopping with Janet. They were doing very well but you know death makes sudden changes. Allan works in a machine shop in Jersey, has been in the same shop for this 7 years he gets his 2 dollars per day + never one day idle. I believe he has saved about 12 or 13 hundred dollars and not married yet. Thomas has gone to Philadelphia and has started a shop on his own ___ had a letter from him a month ago he says he is doing well + making money in spite of hard times. He is married has got 3 children. Robert and Anne are with me at the farm.

This last summer has been very dry and tremendous hot. Image from 95 to a 100 to 105 to 110 in the shade. Winter commences hear about the 15th of November. The snow has been about 2 feet deep with severe frost sometimes 10 to 12 degrees above zero but this degree of cold seldom lasts over 2 or 3 days at a time gets nice again. Today it thaws a little and is foggy but it is seldom the ground is clear of snow before the middle of Aprile and seldom we can plow any before the first of May ^ so you see we have little time to put in our crop but I have got my ground mostly plowed in the fall ^ the crops last summer was very light. Just like what they were in Scotland in the drey year 26 but I had an excellent crop of potatoes, dont think there was better in york state. Potatoes sell in Albany this year at 70 to 80 cents per Bushel.

The price of land hear varyes according to good houses and good location and other improvements on the farm. Say from 15 to 20 to 25 to 30 and some places 40 and 50 dollars per acker and the nearer you to Albany the dearer. You cannot buy land near Albany short of 100 to 200 to 250 dollars per acker and not very good at that but there is no want of farms. Any man will sell his farm if you give him his price.

I see by the papers that the farmers in scotland must be making money as everything is high but stop till the war is over and they will make you pay for it. Everything will go to crash again. I look upon the working people of Scotland to be ten degrees wors of than the slaves in america for they are harder wrought and wors fed and the farmers are but slave drivers but I must stop liest you be offended, for my Blood is geting hot and I thirst for vengence on yur curced landlords pulling the soul out of you every 6 months and your curced quen and your curced priests.

My dear sir wen you recive this letter write to me, send me all the news and I promis you I shant be so long in writing to you again. My wife sends her love to Mrs. Gibson and all your famley, give our love to all the people about southwick and colvend and all iquirng frinds. You will much oblige your most obedient servant Allan Carswell.

When you write adress to Allan Carswell East worcester Otsego county New york state North America. Wishing you a happy new year.