

Mill House Monthly

March, 2015

From the Archives

Below is the transcription from an 1834 letter postmarked Occoquan. It was in our files but is not listed in our catalog. At this point the source of the letter is unknown.

Ellerslie Jany. 31st, 1834

Dear Uncle,

Thinking you would be pleased to learn the particulars of the death and suffering of our deceased relative, with a view of gratifying you I therefore at present attempt to write. With regard to her popularity I can only observe, she died universally lamented not only by her relating but also by every one who knew her. There is no one whose circle of acquaintances was so limited, how generally beliked, it was only necessary for her to be known to be respected and esteemed and as to her intrinsic worth as a member of a family it is incalculable, she will not only be missed by one or two, but by us all, for she was a true friend in need to us all a friend indeed.

Her sufferings were of a short duration but of a most violent character, she was taken on Friday morning and died on Monday about 10 o'clock, her disease was one of a malignant-bilious nature, her countenances from the very onset of her attack, wore a cadaverous as death like aspects showing that the brain and whole nervous system were deeply implicated in the diseased action. Her eyes had a wild and delirious appearances, although she talked perfectly rational to the last. I left on Sunday evening (after being with her all day) and was sent for to see her again before day a very alarming change had taken place, when I arrived however I found her going as fast as possible, as soon as she saw me, she called on me to know what I thought of her case, "be candid [page 2](#) (says she) and do not flatter me, for thank God I am not afraid to die "if it is thy will Oh! Master to call me from this vain world

of sin and sorrow, I feel perfectly resined; thy will be done."

Her words were indeed true, for never in my life did I ever see any one, die so resined, so composed and with all so easy; Evidencing to all human appearances that she felt a strong assurance of a free and gracious passport-under the sure and safe convoy of angels to the eternal mansions of Bliss and Happiness.

When she made this earnest appeal to me, I felt a desire of giving her a candid answer. But my words were stifled within me and I could scarcely give utterance to them, but as well as I could I gave her to understand that her case was altogether hopeless and that no human skills or ingenuity could be of the least avail; "well then (says she) if you say so I know it must be so" "There is yet one thing I wish done, which I beg of you as a favor to do for me" I told her to name it and if possible I would do it. "I wish you to write my will," I got ready to do so and she told me to write as follows.

"My woman Henny shall be freed at my death. William shall serve until he becomes 27 years old at which time he shall be freed. His hire shall first satisfy all claims against me, the remainder of his hire shall go to Mrs. Barnaby Lovejoy and children. George I will and bequeath to Robt. B Kirby to serve him until 27 years old at which time he also shall be free. Deany and Addison, I bequeath, one to Robt. And the other to Rebecca Kirby to serve them until they are 27 years of age at which time they shall be liberated.

After writing this I read it to her she said it was just as he wished and attempted to sign it, but was so far gone she could not, and only made a long mark at the bottom of the paper. She died and left it unsigned and unwitnessed except the testimony. Mother and myself can bear on the occasion- Mr. Kirby was opposed to her [page 3](#) making any will, and thinks the one she has left illegal, and had much rather her little property should be equally disposed of among her relating. For he did not think her in a proper situation to make or write but from the

rational manner which she dictated the will and the perfect rationality of the conversation, I cannot help thinking she seemed to have in view, was the liberation of her slaves.

She expressed a great desire to see you before she died and also wished very much to see my father to have some conversation with, but the old man arrived just as she was expiring. She is gone, but soon shall we all have to follow on after her, to the cold and dreary regions of the graves. Alas how often are our pleasures marred and happiness dampened, by the constant successions of grief and misery, trials and disappointments. Man's liveliest hopes, his most pleasing expectations and his most delightful engagements, Alas! Alas! How often they are nipped like a flower in its bud and leaves naught but a shadow behind. The King and the Peasant the Rich man and the beggar, the master and his slaves, must all be equally humbled in the dust; if we be thy fate, how vain and delusive are all thy longings, how transitory are all thy flaunted goodness. But to return to our subject. Our deceased friend has left behind her a living monument to her memory, that shall cease to exist when all the friends of Margaret Lovejoy shall be laid low in the dust. Her generous nature knew no bounds except when restrained by necessity, always ready to aid the distraught and willing to give succor to the needy may the good she has done in the world meet its appropriate reward in the eternal world to which she has gone. I must now conclude my doleful story by begging you excuse my unconnected and badly written epistle. Thinking it would be interesting to you to learn in a brief and concise manner the particulars of the story I have feebly attempted to narrate is the only excuse I can offer. We are all at present in tolerable health; and should be much pleased to see you and all your family down. Mrs Nevitt joins me in presenting our love to you, Cousin John [page 4](#) And all his family. I should be very glad to hear from you as soon as possible, and to learn from you what would be the best to do by way of discharging the debts against Aunt Peggy-and to know what amount she is indebted in town, she owes several-little debts about in Geo Town and Washington but to what amount I know not.

Please be so kind as to write to me immediately upon the reception of this. I am with great respect and esteem yrs sincerely
Thos. Nevitt

Envelope cover notation: Dr. Thomas Nevitt about death of Miss Margaret Lovejoy-sister of J.N. Lovejoy Sr.

Occoquan
Feby 1 #3

6

Mr. John N. Lovejoy Senr.
Washington D.C.

The Occoquan postmaster in 1834 was Joseph Janney Jr., appointed on July 20, 1826. The letter was written on one large sheet of paper folded in half to make 4 pages. The 3.5" x 7" envelope was a section of the fourth page folded into an envelope shape in such a way that the text was inside other than the notation about the contents.

The letter writer is Dr Thomas Nevitt from Fairfax County. In the 1860 census Dr Nevitt is 53 years old, living south of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. He has 6 children one who is Henry C. Nevitt.

Henry C. Nevitt had a son Benjamin F. Nevitt who was 62 years old in the 1940 census. The 1940 census indicates the family home was located on Route 600 in Fairfax County, which is Silverbrook Rd.

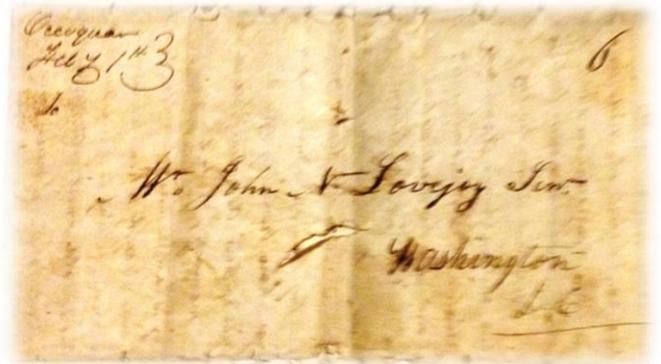
Rhonda Williams, a docent here at the Mill House and at Gunston Hall, remembers the Benjamin F. Nevitt house and the elderly gentleman that lived there when she was a child. Rhonda recalls the house as being close to 200 years old and the largest old house she had ever seen. Though not *Ellerslie*, where Dr. Thomas Nevitt penned his letter on January 31, 1834, it appears several generations of the family lived in southern Fairfax County.

Margaret Miles Lovejoy, who made provisions to free her slaves in her dictated will, and her brother John Naylor Lovejoy were born in Prince Georges County MD. John was born on October 24, 1769 and died on November 19, 1854, in Washington D.C. Margaret Miles Lovejoy had no birth information listed. The data for siblings of John and Margaret show connections to Kirbys and Nevitts.*

Where Margaret Lovejoy lived at the time of her death is unclear. It must have been in close proximity to Dr. Nevitt and Occoquan. He was able to quickly return to her bedside when her condition deteriorated. She died on a Monday which would have been January 28, 1834 and the letter mailed on Saturday, February 1, 1834.

Margaret was described as a loving and respected woman of the community. She desired freedom for her slaves. Realizing the basic wrong in owning another human being, she still couldn't free herself from the financial support the slaves provided for her. Even after her death William, George, Deany and Addison weren't free until her debts were covered and they served yet another owner until they reached the age of 27.

*This information came from page 377 of the *Lovejoy Genealogy*, printed in 1930, written by Clarence Earle Lovejoy, found on Ancestry.com.



Above: Images of the 1834 letter written by Dr. Thomas Nevitt

Winter climate took it's time arriving this season but let itself be known when it did! The Mill House Museum was closed for 5 days in February, two of those weekend days. Spring is here and we look forward to being open 7 days a week, 11-4.

Hands on milling exhibits will return on Sundays, April 5, May 3, July 5, August 2 and September 6.

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