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Geddes, New York, 1829-1935: Letters of George Owens

Richard G. Case

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The old Phillipsburg, New Jersey passenger station on the
Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. 1913

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Geddes, New York, 1829-1835: Letters of George Owens

by Richard G. Case

Family papers are among the most telling sources of New York State history. The Geddes letters introduced by Richard G. Case and printed below are part of such a collection. With more than a dozen other such sets of papers originating with specific New York families, they provide researchers in state history with many details of daily life in varying strata of an earlier society.

Mr. Case is a feature writer for the Syracuse Herald Journal and Herald American, a trustee of Library Associates and a student of New York State history with a special interest in folklore. Before coming to Syracuse he was employed by the Chicago Historical Society in Chicago, where he was co-editor of the book, Portrait of Abraham Lincoln.

“There has been a new Salt Spring dug which promises fair for the place,” George W. Owens wrote from Geddes, New York, in 1829. It was September and he had just arrived in the spunky little settlement on the southwest shores of Onondaga Lake. There had been a pleasant journey on the new Erie Canal and now he was at work—making salt barrels—and sharing in the fair promises of the community’s natural resource, salt, and its man-made wonder, the canal. It seemed a good time to be young and making your way.

George Owens’ letters home, to relatives in Fulton County, New York, and the letters of his grandfather, John Smith, were faithfully preserved by members of the family. Those that follow, covering the years 1829-1835, were written from Geddes to Owens’ mother, Mrs. Mary G. Brockway, wife of Tiffany Brockway, Jr., in Broadalbin, New York. They were presented to the Syracuse University Library, along with many other family papers, by the late Mrs. Frederick Fuhrer of Gloversville.

Geddes, annexed to the city of Syracuse in 1887, was an unincorporated but bustling village of a few hundred settlers when Owens arrived from the East in 1829. The founder, for whom the village was named,

was James Geddes, who formed a company to make salt and settled at the head of the lake in 1794.

Before the canal was constructed, Geddes lived exclusively on salt. Most of the residents were connected, in one way or another, with James Geddes' company or those that followed it. The settlement sat on high ground overlooking the lake and "the swamp," where the village of Syracuse was beginning to show itself. Salina, Geddes' rival as a salt manufacturer, was due east.

We know little of the early days of Geddes, since all of the records up to 1850 were destroyed in a fire of that year, making discovery of letters such as these of more than routine interest. A tavern opened in 1803 and a school the next year. "Judge" Geddes, as he was called, drew up a preliminary village plan in 1807; twenty lots were laid out on either side of the turnpike that eventually became West Genesee Street. Three years after George Owens arrived, Geddes officially became a village.

Completion of the canal in 1825 brought prosperity and growth to Geddes, as it did to many pioneer settlements along its path. Soon there were industries other than those related to salt. The making of pottery at Geddes, ancestor industry of the Syracuse China Company, was one aspect of the "canal boom."

George worked as a cooper, making salt barrels for shipping the area's chief export on the canal. It is not clear whether he did this at Geddes or elsewhere.¹ A "Mr. Patrick" is mentioned as his employer.

The Owens letters contain much information related to his family, some glimpses into the settlement of Ohio and some canal travel data. Much more important to us, however, is the other data he reported, often in a very incidental or casual manner. The letters provide a rich insight into such unrelated matters as land speculation, religious activities, eating customs, formal education and apprenticeships, agricultural patterns, social ethics, medical practice, local health history and specific and general details of economics and business conditions. Our understanding of the development of the Central New York area would be more detailed and accurate if more research collections like the Owens letters were preserved.

A few of George Owens' letters from Geddes have been omitted because they contain little of interest beyond the state of health of the family at the time of writing. Certain repetitive passages and others not germane to the picture of Geddes and George's family also have been omitted from the letters reproduced here. The original spelling has been preserved.

¹At one time Syracuse's North Salina Street, then part of the salt-boiling village of Salina, was called Cooper Street, because of the concentration of barrel-makers. This manufacture once was second only to salt making in Salina.

Letters from Geddes, 1829-1835

Geddes, Sept^r 27 1829

Dear Mother

I wrote you the 30th of August and received both of your letters yesterday and was surprised to hear that you had not received mine. Grandfather, Grandmother, Sidney and James² are all well; never was in better health myself. I make four barrels a day, after another month I can earn Six or Seven Shillings a day. I get Six or Seven dollars for this month and boarded. It was about twelve o'clock at Wednesday night when I arrived at grandfathers. My journey up the Canal was very pleasant. It was night when I came through Utica. It is very healthy in this section of the county. I like it better than Johnstown or Broadalbin. I have not been on the Lake but once it was rather windy. We did not stay out long. There has been a new Salt Spring dug which promises fair for the place. It is a considerable stronger than that of Salina. In Syracuse a negro stole from a trunk eighteen hundred dollars. The next evening a horse was stolen worth one hundred. Business is very dull except stealing. Sidney is painting at Syracuse.

I remain your affectionate Son

George W. Owens



A field of salt vats in Salina. From an engraving in *Historical Collections of the State of New York*, by John W. Barber and Henry Howe. 1842

² Sidney and James Smith, George's uncles, brothers of his mother, Mary Brockway.

Geddes Feby 9th 1830

Dear Son & Daughter

Your letter of the 31st ult. came here in Season. I was very glad to here that you was all in good Helthe. More so on account of what I had Heard before Respecting your son Tiffany Helth. You say that he is Well Enough to attend School which I feel very glad to here of. I am in as good Helth as you Even saw me and feel well. My wife, Sidney & James are all in good Helth and you will se how fat and Helthy George is and how he has grown Since he came up here. Business is very Dull with us and we have had the coldest time for about two weeks here that has been known for a number of years. It Snowed here 20 days one Day after another for that time. The Snow now is about two feet Deep on a leavil. Fine Sleighing you may Depend on, But not money Enough to Spend Much time in Riding out. . . .

yours Respectfully,

John Smith

Geddes May 9th 1830

Dear Mother

I take up my pen to inform you of my good health and the rest of the family and suppose you have heard from us before by uncle Lucius. The spring is very forward, fruit trees have leaved out, fields of wheat looks promising. It is uncommon healthy for the season of the year few cases of the fever again excepted. I have lived here for a year and expect to get twelve dollars a month, clear of my board, at least, in cash. Business has considerably revived. I expect a letter from you soon. Remember me to the rest of the family.

Your affectionate Son

George W. Owens

Geddes Augt 28th 1830

Dear Daughter

Your letter of the 16th Instant Directed to your son George was Rec in Due time. . . . By the Tennor of your Letter it Seems as if you give your self more trouble about George than I think it

is Necessary. You may Rest well Satisfied that he is in the Best of hands and that I Shall take every care of him that May be Expected any parent would Do for their own child. George is in fine Health, has not been sick one Day since he came here, is very sturdy and is well Likened by the old and young people here. I think I may say he is Doing well. Should he be sick or any unforeseen accident happen to him I Shall give you the Earliest Information. We are all in charming Health and have a plenty to Eat Drink and to ware and feel in good spirits. Your Mother has become very fleshy, but is in fine Health Not withstanding Likes here well.

I now will give you a Short account of a Camp Meeting of this week kept by the Methodist. George and James attend one Day. George says they made more noise than he ever heard before. They begun the Meeting Tuesday and Ended this Day on Satherday. I am Informed that 83 persons Rec what they call the power and became good or in other words Reledegeus Persons. I Must say that I have Some Doughts on my mind of Such Changes, But I hope they are Real genuine and pure. We have a number of those Methodist here and I like them well as Neighbors and cittezens, But such Hollowing and Screaming I think may as well be Dispensed with.

George attends Meeting very Steady. I now think I Shall have him attend School Next winter and obtaine Some more Learning Sufficeant to Do any Business that he may be in. My Respects to Mr. Brockway and his family and all our friends. Farewell for the present

John Smith

P.S. Sidney has Just come Home and is well. He sends his Respects to you all. George and James Spend the most of the time in Making Salt Barrels. George Makes about \$10 to \$11 per month clear from all Expenses.

J. Smith

December 26, 1830

Dear Parent

I take up my pen, to inform you, of my good health and, that of the rest of the family. There has been no sickness in the place since you left here. It has been uncommon warm for the Season. We had green peas in the garden the fifth of this month. We have had good sleighing for about a week, but now it has

gone. I began to go to School last thursday and expect to go two months. . . . We had a letter from Sidney the 23 of last month. He states he has got work at the town of Waren, Ohio Trumble County, and thinks he Shall make a stand there. . . .

Your most Affectionate

George W. Owens

I have got a new Geography and Atlas, a new kind of English reader. I Shall Study Geography, gramer and Arithmatich and writing.

Geddes, April the 17th 1831

Dear Mother

We received a letter from you Sometime ago, and was pleased to hear that you was all well. We had a letter from Sidney about a fortnight ago. He states they have had the small pox there at Warren. He writes that he has been very healthy and has enough work to do. It is a general time of health here especially with us. I am to work for the same man I work for last summer, (Mr. Patrick), and expect to work till winter. I Shall have fifteen dollars a month besides my board, if well. I went to school about ten weeks.

Give my respects to father and family,

Your most affectionate Son

George W. Owens

Geddes, August, 14th, 1831

Dear Mother

We received your last letter last Sabbath, and was much pleased to hear that you and the rest of the family were in usual health. We had a letter from Sidney last week. Says he has work a plenty and in good health. He says there is a canal coming within two miles of his land, if not through it. He thinks it will raise the value of his land, and Shall not sell it now. There is not a plumb on the trees in our garden and Shall not have So much fruit as we had when you was here. Buisness of all kinds is going on, more prosperous than last year. A flouer mill is building within a quarter of a mile of this place, which will cost at least

twenty thousand dollars, and other buildings to the amount of ten thousand more.³ My prospects are better than in the spring, and shall have work till the first of January. We are all enjoying good health. Give my respects to father, and family.

Your affectionate Son,

G. W. Owens

December 4th, 1831

Dear Mother,

I don't know how I shall excuse myself in so long delaying writing to you, but hoping in a mother's clemency, will write a few lines, and endeavor for the future to be a little more punctual, Last Sabbath received a letter from Siddney. He left Warren and gone to Elyria, 28 miles from Cleaveland, thinks he shall stay there through the year, thinks he shall do better there than at Warren, To morrow I expect to go down the Oneida river and make a payment on my land, and by the first of January I intend going to school till the first of March. My prospects are as fair as I can expect. I have earn from \$26 to 30 dollars a month since the first of last April. We are all in good health and good spirits. As for James he is either speculating or hunting. He has shot eleven wild ducks, and six at one shot. . . .

Your affectionate Son

George W. Owens

Geddes, May 20th, 1832

Dear Mother,

. . . Perhaps you think I have forgotten you, but I hope you will forgive me once more. But the reason for my not writing before was on account of a law suit with the Constable who was accountable to me for my loss last fall. The trial took place on the 10th of this month. I recovered damages \$44.56 and the rest stands good against him, which is about 65 dollars in another execution. We had a letter from Sidney dated Elyria, Loraine County, Ohio 15th of April. Elyria is about twenty-five miles

³In 1831, according to *Onondaga Centennial: Gleanings of a Century* (Bruce, 1896), "Jonas Mann had a large grist mill built where Genesee Street crosses the canal but his death put an end to the enterprise and the mill never operated."

from Cleaveland. Says he is well and likes the Country much. I wrote you in my last, that we should make you a visit this month, but in consequence of a hurry of our work, we have delayed the time till the first of July, for the time then will be more favorable. My health is good. Grandfather and Grandmother are quite unwell. James is in tolerably good health. Give my respects, and good wishes to father and family.

I remaine your Obedient and affectionate Son,

George W. Owens

Receipt for making Rheubarb Syrap

Take two ounces of pulverized Roubarb, half a pint of white lye, half a pint of good brandy, quarter of a pound of loaf Sugar, and bottle it up, then it is fit for use. You may expect us all before the seventh of July.

Geddes, August 10th, 1832

Dear Parent

This morning I received your kind letter of the 29th of July, in which you request our return to Johnstown. I think there is no more danger here, than with you. There has been about 15 deaths and about 40 cases in the whole in this town. Two or three in this place, one death. Elder Gilbert is dead, but his wife is getting better.⁴ We had a letter from Sidney last Sunday. He states he is well, but how long he will stay at Elyria is uncertain. It is very healthy here excepting the Cholerea. Mr. Gibbs died before our return. We had a very quick passage of 35 hours. Grandfather made no arrangements with Mr. Jackson. We are all well, my health never was better.

Give my respects to father and family.

Your affectionate Son

George W. Owens

Geddes November 19th 1832

Dear Mother

I received your last letter after some weeks suspense, but you do not state as having had mine of August. You Seem to

⁴This probably is a reference to the Asian cholera epidemic that swept the area in 1832. One hundred deaths in Syracuse and Salina were reported.

think that I have forgotten you, But when you have any reason to think So, I wish you would forget me. Do not be to anxious about me, for I think I'm doing well enough. The last heard from Sidney, he was in village Elyria, County of Lorain. Thinks he Shall be home another year and is doing well. We have had the hottest Election ever held in this County.⁵ At least 5000 dollars have changed pockets in this town. We have never had a better fall for work, it is now as warm as the middle of April. Have had a little Snow, but is now gone. Buissness is brisk. We have the Small Pox at Doctor Thomptson's⁶ and other places, uncommonly healthy here. Last Sunday night, the wife of Squire Northrum of Sallina⁷ cut her own throat and Soon died, cause unknown, I wish you would write the last you heard from Nathan. We are all in usual health. Give my respects to father and family. James is 15 years old to day, has the kind pox and has gone to bed sick.

I remain your forgetful Son

George W. Owens

I wish you would send some papers.

Geddes July 14th 1833

My Dear Daughter

As it has been Sometime Since I wrote to you, I think it may be agreeable to you to Recive a few lines from me. All tho I cannot Say to you that my Helth is good Still I can say I am able to be about and attend to my Business in a moderate way. Your mother, James and George are in good Helth and I can say that this place is Remarkably Helthy. We have one of the finest Seasons Here that has been for many years past. Everything that grows out of the ground looks fine. We have in our Garding the most plumbs that we Ever had and there is an abundance of peaches here this season. I give you an invitation as well as Col Brockway to make us a visit on or before the first of September next and we will accompany you to old Oswego on Lake ontario which place I think wood please you well to see. Our Business is good and we have a plenty to Eat and Drink and a fair prospect for more for we have now a growing upwards of one Hundred as

⁵The national election of 1832. Andrew Jackson defeated Henry Clay.

⁶Dr. Cyrus Thomson, founder of the so-called Thomsonian School of botanic medicine, came to Geddes some time before 1830 and began to manufacture remedies. He later bought the large building at Erie Boulevard and West Genesee Street (torn down just a few years ago) as a sanitarium.

⁷Perhaps the lawyer, Alfred Northam.

fine chickings as you ever saw and they will be Large Enough by the time you come here to make use of in any way that will Sute you Best. . . . you will see what improvement [George] has made In writeing, since he wrote you Last. There has been a writeing school in this village and George and James have attended about 18 Days, three Hours Each Day and I am well pleased that I advised them to go^w to the School. George is very Steady and makes out well. It was a good thing for him comeing here with me. If my Judgement Does not fail me, George will in time make a man of property and Good Standing. I Shall not Spare any pains to give him all the Information I can how to persue Business. At all Events I think you may with propreity render thanks to God that it has So happened that he had Such friends around him to Direct his ways being Left as he was when a child. You May Rest Satisfyed that he Stands well in this place as to his Caractor and Prudence and Industry . . .

Your friend and

Parent

John Smith

Geddes Dec. 15th 1833

Dear Mother

. . . I wish you would write as soon as possible and let me know what you can about Deacon Hart of Pompey from whom you once received a letter, for from what I can learn he lives there now, near Pompey Hill. Let me know my father's brothers names. I think one lives in Pompey. You would like to hear from them as well as I should. You remember me to father [and] family.

I remain your affectionate Son

George W. Owens

Geddes February 23^d 1834

Dear Mother

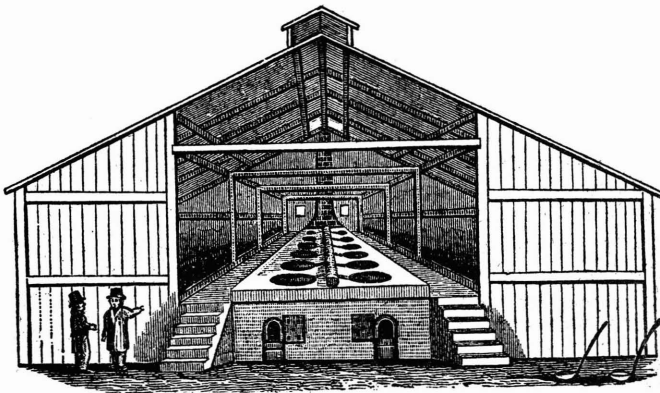
. . . I began to go to school about the first of January and went about five weeks, but having so much work to do, I had to leave my School and go to work and have been to work about two weeks. We have now as fine a time for business as we could wish, excepting the going has [been] rather muddy since the first

of this month. Last night we had a smart thunder shower. Last week we had a letter from Sydney, he is pursuing his Studies in Warren, and says he is well. I have learnt that Deacon Hart has left Pompey and moved to Cisero, a town joining Salina. The going has been so bad that I could not get there. Mr. Aiken and family moved near Liverpool last fall, but we have not seen any of the family yet. I saw Miss Hungerford, the old maid, about three weeks ago at Salina. She is enjoying very good health. Perhaps you would like to know what I have been studying this winter, my studies were grammer, composition, natural philosophy and writing. Having nothing more to write I shall close by requesting you to write soon, the last news from the west.

Give my respects to Father and family,

I remain, Dear Mother, Your affectionate Son

George W. Owens



Internal view of a salt manufactory in Salina. From an engraving in *Historical Collections of New York State*, by John W. Barber and Henry Howe. 1842

Geddes, June 15th 1834

Dear Mother

I received yours of the first a few days since and was gratified to hear from you, though it was somewhat unexpectedly. Yet I was not surprised that you wished that I should settle nearer home than Illinois, but on the contrary think that your wishes are very reasonable, and are no more than I could expect from Mother. I should certainly deem myself unworthy of a Mothers care and anxiety were I to disregard her requests. You

may be surprised yourself when I tell you that I had almost concluded not to go to Illinois. About ten days since, having cut my thumb so I could not work in the shop, Grandfather and I took horse and wagon and took a trip out into Ontario County, about forty five miles from here. Could I obtain some places I saw, I should never think of going out of the state of New York. It was not till after our return that I received your welcomed letter. We intend looking more before we conclude to purchase. About a fortnight after our return from Johnstown, I went to Cisero to Uncle Ezra Harts, found them all well and had a very pleasant visit. Solomon Owen lives in the town of Lisle in Broome County. Jehiel [is] gone to Michigan. John Owen lives in Rensselaersville. Josiah Owen died some ten or twelve years ago. Aunts Calender and Austen reside in Sherburne. As to the cloth, you may prepare thirty yards if you can, as grandfather and James will want considerable. We should like one half a dark snuff color and the other a dark green. If you can not spare more than 15 yds, you may have it all green, and well done. A few days since, we had a letter from Sidney. He is still in Warren, Trumble County. He states that he is enjoying good health and pursuing his studies. Mrs. Sammons died last tuesday, aged 73, and was buried last thursday. On way to Ontario, we put up for the night at Auburn. The next morning visited the State prison. It contains nearly a 1000 prisoners, some working at one trade some at another, all working with great regularity and order. I was surprised to find the greatest proportion of young men, say from 20 to 35 years of age. You had better conclude to come with Aunt Harriet next fall. If you do, I will send you money to bear expenses. We should like to have the cloth here as early as possible and if you do not come here yourself, I do not know how you will get it here. There are a number of families going to the west and some gone, but this country is good enough for me.

As this is rather a long letter for me, I must close it at once.

I remain your affectionate Son

G. W. Owens

Geddes, August 31st 1834

Dear Mother

I received yours of the 18th inst. last sabbath, and should have answered immediately, if Grandfathers health had been as good as it is at present, although it is very poor. He was pretty

smart when he came home, but about a fortnight Since he . . . was taken with an inflammation of the bladder and has not been able to do anything Since, but is able to be about. The rest of us are in good health, excepting James, [who] has been complaining of being unwell for the week past, but he is now upon the gain. We received last week a letter from Sidney. He was well. Probably you have had one from him as he says he has had one from you. He states that the cholera rages in Ohio to a considerable extent, and as far as we can learn, it exists from Buffalo to Detroit on the lake shore. . . . I should be glad to have you here with us this fall, but as there is so much sickness in the country, and as the cholera may be here, you had better wait until more healthy times. . . .

Remember me to Father and family.

Your affectionate Son

G W Owens

Geddes Oct. 2nd 1834

My Dear Daughter

You may be Glad to hear from us as there has been Such Mortality in this town of late with the Cholera. I give you a Statement which may be considered to be correct; in Syracuse there has Died in a few Days of the Cholera about 15 in all, and at Salina about 45 in all. . . . There has not been anyone here Died besides and the Place is very Healthy and the cholera Has Disappeared once more. The most of those that Died were Forreiners and the low Class of People with Bad Habbits. I have not been well Since I Saw you in Johnstown, But have been able to be about and Done Some labour. James has been sick with a fever. [In] about four weeks has got well and as Harty as you Ever Saw him. George has not been Sick one Day this Summer [and] is now in fine Health. Your Mother is not very well, has been for Some time complaining. I am in Hopes She will feel Better as the weather Becomes Cooler. I now think that George and my self will start for a trip to the Ohio next week, if nothing happens before that time to Prevent us.

Your affectionate Parent

John Smith

Geddes, Nov. 23^d 1834

Dear Mother,

I received your letter dated Sept 28 the day before we started for the western country and hoped to have answered it sooner, not expecting to be gone more than about three weeks, but instead of that we have been nearly Six weeks. We started from this, on, the 13th of last month. We arrived in Buffalo on the 16th. Having some business there, we did not go on to the Steam boat until the evening of the 18th, and then was obliged to stay in port for a day and a half on account of a storm on the Lake. Left the 20th and arrived in Warren in three days from Buffalo. Staid there one day with Sidney. He is in good health and is so fat that he is fairly puffy. He paints when he has good jobs, and the rest of his time he spends in studying. Being now so near the Ohio river, and Virginia, we concluded at once to go into that State to see Mr. Patrick, the man that ran away three years ago and owed us. We found the gentleman about 60 miles up the great Kanawha river in Virginia and doing a good business. He Settled with us very honourably. We was in the state only 5 days and then went down the Ohio river to Portsmouth, then took a canal boat to Chillicothe. This is a town of considerable importance and handsomely built. We left here by stage at 4 oclock in the morning. We went along very well for about four miles when going through a piece of woods, one of the forward wheels struck a Stump Six inches high, threw the driver from his Seat. The horses became frightened, but they soon stopped by the exertions of the driver, who was thrown under the coach, just as they came to a halt, with his head immediately under the wheel and would have been crushed to death had they gone Six inches farther. Some of the harness having broke, we staid in the woods for two hours, and then started again for Columbus where we arrived safe in the afternoon. This day we passed mostly through a prairie country, very fertile. Columbus is finely situated and handsomely built and is growing very fast. From here went to Dayton, on the great Miami. From this, we went to Piqua, about 90 miles from fort Defiance on the Maumee. There is a canal now being built from Dayton through Piqua to fort Defiance. In my opinion, this part will be the garden of Ohio. We returned to Columbus on account of the roads being very bad to Sandusky. From Columbus we went to Zanesville on the Muskingum, by way of the great National road. Sixteen miles from this we took boat on the canal to Cleaveland. No Steam boats being in and the wind blowing so very fair, we concluded to take a Schooner then

in port a loading. We started just at dark with a fine breeze, the Captain assured us that he should reach Buffalo in less than twenty four hours, providing we had fair wind. We arrived off Erie in Pennsylvania, the next morning, it being 100 miles and half way to Buffalo. But the wind had Shifted by this time from west to the north east, so that we had to tack about four or five miles to gain one. We were thus driven about at the mercy of the wind and waves for three days, when at last we got into port safe, but not exactly well, for both of us were sea sick and took cold on top of that, so that we did not very Slick. We soon took passage on a canal boat for home, where we arrived last thursday morning. I have come to the Conclusion not to like that State better than I do this state., though we was much pleased with the country. We are all in good health. Grandfather is much better, before we left home his complaint having left him. Grandmother is in pretty good Spirits. James is as hearty as a bear and is now as tall as myself. Business rather dull here, if I do not get something of work for the winter I Shall make you a visit. Tell Father he need not trouble himself about the money, for I am not in need of it at present I wish you would write me as soon this reaches you. Give my respects to father and family, hoping that this may find you in good health, and that you will forgive my long delay in writing. I will try and make it up by a long visit. Ohio has a Whig Legislature but a Jackson Governour. Farwell.

I remain your affectionate Son

George W Owens

Geddes, May 10th 1835

Dear Mother

I received your letter of 15th ulta., and I was glad to hear that you was in usual health. Tell Amanda I wish her much Joy & a long life of love and happiness. Sidney left here about a fortnight since. He brought some weding cake. It was very good but rather dry. Some Mallaga wine would have made it better. My collars and boosons we made in very good Style. I think much of them as coming from Mother. Grandfather and Grandmother are in usual health. James goes as a hand on a line boat. He was here last Saturday and in good health. He quit Coopering on account of its giving him a pain in his Side. I think I Shall go to the west this fall and purchas some land unless I can find some business that will be good here. Do not expect to work at my trade more

than three or four months longer, it being Just about good for nothing. We have tride every way to turn ourselves, but nothing will doo. Grandfather advises me to quit the business as soon as I can., & it being your desire that I Should get me a farm, I think now is as favourable a time as any, & and if I Should will let you know, in time. There are a great many going to Illisnois this Spring & Summer from this quarter, some to Texas. I think I Shall not go farther than Illisnoi. We Shall expect you and Aunt Harriet here in August, for then we Shall have a plenty of fruit. As yet, we have had a very backward spring and uncommonly cold. You can have no idea how great the emigration is for the west. Almost every boat is crowded with moovers. Should they continue to go as fast till fall, they of themselves would form a State. Three families Start this weæk from this place for the far west. I know not how far I Shall go, but for your sake, no further than I can help. It is not So much for great riches as it is for independance that I wish for, for it does not require so much to place a man above the wants and miseries that encompass mankind as a great many imagine. I have delayed writing till now, for to have something to write about. Grandmother says that you must come by the middle of August. Remember me to all inquiring friends.

I Subscribe myself your

Obedient Son

Geo. W. Owens

“No further than I can help” turned out to be Ohio, where George and his grandparents went in 1835. Grandfather Smith bought a farm near Perrysburg and George Owens’ letters to his mother from 1835 through 1864 recount his attempts at farming, first with his grandfather and then on his own; his failure at farming and his return to his trade of coopering, this time making flour barrels; his marriage and the birth of seven children. He reports the death of both grandparents, his quarrel with his cousin James and the death of his own elder son John in 1863 at Chickamauga. The Owenses moved about within a small area of Ohio as George went from farming to coopering and back again, usually working for someone else and living in rented houses, never making a success of either occupation and always looking ahead to the time when he could buy his own bit of land or set up his own barrel shop. In one of the Ohio letters he compares his lot with that of his cousin James. James had become a successful business man of some wealth; George was poor although he always managed to feed his family. But

James' marriage and home life were not happy; in this respect George makes it clear that no one could be happier than he. Although financially distressed most of the time, he and his Emaline, with their seven children, each of which he describes with joy and pride to his mother, were a loving and happy family. He seems to have proved to himself through experience in his maturity what he stated blithely and with such assurance in his youth: “. . . it does not require so much to place a man above the wants and miseries that encompass mankind as a great many may imagine.”

George's letters end in 1864. Subsequent letters from his children to his mother shed no light on when or where he died.

