

[1840-02-14]

Envelope addressed to:

Miss Mary W. Boynton¹
Eaton, Preble Co., Ohio

Bears following postmark:

Crawfordsville, Ia.
Feb. 18

Letter is as follows:

Crawfordsville [Ind.] Friday Eve
Feb, 14th 1840

My Dear Sister:

With a trunk for a chair and a box, for a desk, in front of a good fire in the back room of Wm. H. Boynton & Co.'s Store Crawfordsville, Ia.² I will attempt to give you a brief³ description of our journey. On Monday 12 o'clock, Feb. 3, 1840, Mr. J. C. Ross⁴ (by the way the finest kind of man) started⁵ for Iowa City, we stopped at Liberty, [Ind.] and spent the night⁶; the next morning took an early start and after traveling 24 miles over hills, etc., through the towns of Brownsville, Waterloo, & Cambridge [all in Ind.] we arrived at Dublin, [Ind.] on the National Road⁷ where we put up for the night. Wednesday morn

¹ Mary White Boynton, William's sister [1850 Census shows her age as 25; Morgan Stafford, in his *A Genealogy of the Kidder Family* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Pub.Co., 1941), @ pg. 61, says she was born 20 June 1811. In a letter written decades later dated simply "Nov. 25" from her home in Greenwood, Indiana, she says she is six years older than Wm.] She was apparently named in honor of her maternal grandmother, Mary (White) Kidder.

² As can be seen from the envelope postmark, "Ia" was the postal abbreviation for Indiana at that time.

³ All underlining appears in the original letter.

⁴ John Clifford Ross. He was husband of William's cousin, Rebecca (Kidder) Ross. A considerable number of William's relatives were living in Oxford at this time, probably arriving in 1835-36. William's maternal uncle, Nathaniel Kidder, and Nathaniel's daughters Rebecca Ross (with her husband & 2 sons), Mary Kidder, Charlotte (Kidder) Chamberlain (& her husband – mentioned near end of letter), & Elizabeth Kidder resided in Oxford. In addition, William's widowed aunt Elizabeth (Kidder) Chamberlain (who was Nathaniel Kidder's sister) was living there. [Stafford, *op. cit.*, p. 122; 1840 Census; 1850 Census] In a letter written decades later dated simply "Nov. 25" from her home in Greenwood, Indiana, Mary Boynton says she & Wm. came to Oxford when he was 18 and she was 24. That would mean between Dec, 1835, and June, 1836.

At the time of the journey to Crawfordsville chronicled in this letter, William was 22 yrs old, while Ross was 31.

⁵ Probably from Oxford, since that is where the Ross family lived.

⁶ Oxford to Liberty, Ohio is a distance of 17 miles, which would be about the most distance that could be covered by horse-drawn wagon (see contents below) in half a day.

⁷ The National Road was America's first "highway." Constructed over a period of 38 years (1803-1841), it began at Cumberland, Maryland and ended at Vandalia, Ill. Having approached from the southeast (Oxford), William & Ross connected with the Road at Dublin. From there they would have remained on the Road for the next 51 miles to Indianapolis (along present Route 40), at which point the Road headed southwest to Terre Haute while William & Ross continued west, then northwest for the balance of their journey.

arose very early got our horses shod, etc., and after traveling 30 miles over a splendid road arrived at Springfield⁸ where we stopped for another night. After taking care of our horses we retired, awoke early the next morning Thursday, and the rain pouring down in torrents, however he harnessed up and started, after traveling until three o'clock through the rain we arrived in Indianapolis, a beautiful town, and containing many splendid buildings among which are the State House, Bank and various others. After making a short stop we drove on 5 miles farther which made us 26 miles that day. The next day Friday the roads were exceedingly muddy so that we were obliged to walk a great part of the way however we traveled 18 miles to Danville nearly used up.⁹ Saturday morn we started and after traveling 8 miles through the mud we arrived at a creek [and] found several people on the oposite [sic] side on horseback, not daring to cross it. If they could not cross on horseback what could we do with loaded wagons! We almost despaired of getting across at all, but finally got out the axe and went to cutting and lugging out the ice and after wading about the water, mud and ice we succeeded in getting across – That was called the little Eel River. We drove on two miles farther and came to the big Eel river a great deal [more] work than the other, after working in the water getting out ice until nearly dark we put all the horses to one waggon [sic] and succeeded in getting across. And then went back and got the other about half way over when Tom and Fanny commenced rearing and pitching about.¹⁰ I expected every minute to see Tom drowned. Mr. Ross jumped in to his assistance and was in the greatest danger of being killed. Well we got safe to the other side with the exception of being wet from head to foot. We soon found a log hut where after taking care of our horses we put up for the night.¹¹ For supper we had 1 old dirty bowl of milk between us, and a piece of corn bread harder than Pharioh's heart. (It is so long since I have seen him I have forgotten how to spell his name.)¹² No spoon on the table. Well Sunday morn the way it rained or rather poured down [sic] but we were afraid unless we drove on the creeks would be so high that it would be impossible [to] pass them; so we started. I think I never saw it rain faster it seemed like travelling in a river the water was so deep in the roads, well we travelled 5 miles through the woods without seeing a house and came to a river called the little Racoon. After getting the away [**?*]** as we had done the day previous we succeeded in getting over. Completely saturated from head to foot after traveling 2 or 3 miles farther we came to the Big Racoon = The rain had swollen it so that it [was] impossible to cross it, as it was several feet higher than a horse's back. Some men came and told us that by going down stream 1 ½ miles we should find a more shallow ford they went with us, and we succeeded in crossing the water being almost over the top of our waggons. We were then within 1 ½ miles of Ladoga where we drove as soon as possible as we were completely saturated with water. We remained there until the next pm when we harnessed up and drove on two miles farther where we came to a creek which was impassible. We staid [sic] there that night Monday, at Mr. Harrison's.¹³ I got out my flute and spent the evening very pleasantly as his daughters were all singers.¹⁴

⁸ Certainly he meant Greenfield, which is 30 miles west of Dublin, while Springfield was 80 miles in the opposite direction.

⁹ The modern day route is roughly along the Rockville Road (State Route 36).

¹⁰ From the context, "Tom" and "Fanny" were names of two of the horses.

¹¹ Based on the distance traveled, etc., it appears this harrowing leg of their journey would have taken them northwest from Danville along present Indiana State Route 36, across the little Eel River, through the present town of North Salem, then across the big Eel River via the modern day Ladoga Road to just a couple of miles north of the river. I imagine that since they had to break ice in the river to make the crossing, being "wet from head to foot" could put them in some danger of freezing to death if they didn't get to shelter quickly.

¹² This aside gives us some picture of William's sense of humor.

Tuesday morning we crossed the creek and drove to this place [i.e., Crawfordsville].¹⁵ Finding the rivers and creeks so high that we could go no farther we rented a store. Wednesday morn we unloaded the goods and Mr. Ross started for home.

Sabbath pm ½ pas 3 o'clock [Feb 16, 1840]

My Dear sister as I have no ink and the stores being closed I shall be obliged to write with a pencil. As I have the store and two horses¹⁶ to attend it takes every moment of my time. I have not called on a lady since I arrived here nor do I expect to as every moment of my time is occupied. I like this place better than any place I have seen since I left New England.¹⁷ I hope that I shall make business so profitable that I can remain here and have you with me this summer.

There are two very pretty girls where I board and some first rate young men. I have found a great many friends, without seeking them altho I came here an entire stranger. After dinner today I went into the parlour Miss Ristine¹⁸ got the singing book and we have been singing until now. I told her I must go and write my sister. She says give her my love. Her brother also wishes me to put in his respects. I saw Miss Crawford at church today, the one that was at Oxford commencement¹⁹ with Mr. Fisher. I intend calling there this Eve – as it is the only time I have. They think I am the greatest businessman that was ever in this town. I have Ministers Lawyers Doctors Ladies, etc., etc. almost constantly in the store. I think if I have a good stock of goods I could sell more than any house in town.

Money is very scarce and as I sell entirely for cash cannot do a very heavy business at present but the people all seem very anxious to have me remain here and I have no doubt can sell as many goods as they do in Oxford. If I do remain here I certainly shall insist upon your coming you would like

¹³ This was likely the farm of Joshua Harrison, which was located near Ladoga. Harrison represented Montgomery Co. in the Indiana state legislature that year (1840). [H. W. Beckwith, *History of Montgomery County, Indiana* (Chicago: HH Hill, 1881) p. 380.]

¹⁴ So, we can see that William had some musical talent, and enjoyed sharing it with others.

¹⁵ So, we know that William arrived in Crawfordsville, the birthplace of his daughter, Elizabeth Morrison (Boynton) Harbert, at about noon, on Tuesday, 11 Feb 1840. He had left at noon on Monday, 3 Feb. The trip took almost exactly 8 days to the hour, and covered 150 miles.

¹⁶ Given William's reference during one of the river crossings to "all the horses" (see letter contents above), I surmise that he & Ross headed out in two horse-drawn wagons, carrying their personal gear and the goods expected to initially stock the store. If I am correct, William's "two horses" reference suggests Ross took one empty wagon with two horses on his return trip to Oxford.

¹⁷ William left New England in c 1835-1836, probably accompanying his uncle Nathaniel, and others, to Oxford (see footnote 4 above). His mother had died in 1831, when he was 14. His only adult female relative living at that time was his maternal grandmother, Mary (White) Kidder. It is likely she assisted William's widowed father in caring for William & Mary. Both his grandmother and his father, Wm. F. Boynton, died in 1835 when William was 17 yrs old. According to his sister's "Greenwood Nov. 25th" letter, he was 18 when he went to Ohio.

¹⁸ At this time a major boarding house in Crawfordsville was run by Maj. Henry Ristine, one of the original settlers of Crawfordsville in the 1820s. This reference to "Miss Ristine" is probably to his daughter, and indicates that William was boarding at the Ristine establishment.

¹⁹ Oxford was the home of what is now known as Miami (Ohio) University. In fact, the tract of land upon which the town was founded was original called "College Township" as it had been originally plotted for an academy. In 1839 the University had 250 students. Benjamin Harrison, 23rd President of the United States, would graduate from there in 1852.

[it] here very much. If I can only have you with me I can be happy anywhere. I shall write to Mr. Chamberlain²⁰ & Ross²¹ soon.

Do write as soon as you receive this and tell me how you got back to Eaton.²² Write a long letter immediately and send your love or respect to Miss Ristine as will probably board there if you come to Crawfordsville.

Do not forget to write immediately to your Devoted brother WHB.

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIPTION

I, John A. Frederick, hereby attest and certify that:

1. I possess the original of the above-transcribed letter.
2. The foregoing transcription, consisting of 4 pages (including the page bearing this Certificate) is true and correct, and was transcribed by me on the date set forth on the footer of each page.

Signed by me on this __ day of April, 2012.

John A. Frederick

²⁰ This was almost certainly Wm. Edwin Chamberlain, the son of William's aunt, Elizabeth (Kidder) Chamberlain and her husband Elijah Chamberlain (d. 10 Oct 1837). In a sense he was a double-cousin, as he had previously married Rebecca (Kidder) Ross's sister, Charlotte Augusta Kidder. [Stafford, *op. cit.*, p. 123.] (See footnote 4 above.) He appears in the 1840 Census for Butler Co., Ohio, as W. E. Chamberlain.

²¹ By 1850 the Ross family had moved to Harrison, Vigo Co., Ind. [1850 Census.] Harrison is about 5 miles north of Terre Haute. By 1860 they had moved to Terre Haute, and were living next door to the Solomon Harbert family. [1860 Census] Solomon's son, William, would meet William Boynton's daughter, Elizabeth, in that year. They married ten years later.

²² As of the date of this transcription, I have not been able to determine why Mary was living in Eaton at this time, nor with whom she resided.