

## **Introductory note**

The following pages contain a transcript of a letter sent by James Lawrie at Gresford, NSW, Australia, to his brother John in Massachusetts, USA in 1850. The "cover", which is a philatelic term for an envelop or letter, is owned by Carol Bommarito, a philatelist specializing in postal history, specifically transatlantic mail to and from the U.S. from 1840 to 1875.

Carol's article about this cover was published in the American Philatelic Society's journal. The link is: <https://stamps.org/news/c/start-collecting/cat/collecting-resources/post/new-south-wales-covers>

Carol has generously made available a transcript of the letter.

After Carol's transcript of the letter, some explanatory notes have been added by Dr Brian Walsh, a member of Paterson Historical Society. These notes have been prepared by Brian to assist understanding of the context of the letter and some aspects of it.

Gresford

New South Wales

Sunday 26 May 1850

Dear Brother

I would have wrote you before this time but having wrote home to my friends a short time after I came here wishing them to write you when they had an opportunity of doing and also wanting to know how I was to get on made me delay writing you till the present and in case you have heard no word about me since I wrote you when I left Gravesend I will give you a statement of how I have come on be landed in Sydney on Sunday morning 23 September after a voyage of 101 days all in good health having only one death and four births and on Tuesday following was examined before the Commissioners and having got an account of how things were going on in Sydney from two of our Townsmen who came alongside of our ship a short time after we landed stating to us that all that a weaver could make on the average was about 18 shillings per week besides house rent was very high a room & kitchen cost about 8 shillings a week and fuel and water now after having got that statement from them and having a wife & family besides very little cash made me resolve to come up the bush well we got an offer from the Commissioners either to come up to Maitland a distance by water of 150 miles where there was a depot when we would get provisions till such time as we could employment so I left along with about twenty families in the steam boat on the Wednesday after we landed and in coming up I engaged with a Mr. Wm. Boydell as shepherd for six months at the rate of £7:10 besides rations viz 10<sup>lb</sup> flour 10<sup>lb</sup> beef 1/4lb tea 2lb sugar weekly when I left him the 29 March and engaged with one of the name of Mr. James Towns to work with another man on the halves and I will try to explain how the man ploughs the ground and Jamie drives the bullocks while I the wife & children does any other thing we can do on the farm and for that our master has to pay the rent of the ground providing us with bullocks and all our working utensils besides the half of all our seeds and 3 rations weekly that is 30lb flour 30lb beef 3 qtr lb Tea 6lb sugar and he receives the half of all we raise while the man & I receives the other half we have about 20 acres of ground and we intend to lay it out in the following manner we will grow about eight or nine acres Tobacco and the rest in Wheat and Indian corn and if the Tobacco should only turn out about half a ton to the acre and allowing it to sell at the rate of 4d per pound as it does at shop and sometimes as high as 7 or 8 pence in the leaf I will have a chance of soon being able to take a piece of ground for myself and any person can grow and work Tobacco we first sow beds and then transplant them out same as we do cabbages at home I have been falling trees since I came on the farm we first cross cut them and then draws them altogether in a heap and burns them I found it very strange at first but I would rather work out of doors than I would do at the Loom my shears are all rust and I think if you had as much money beside you as would pay your passage and hold yourself for a twelvemonth and getting

2 or 3 acres of ground which I could get for you by planting Tobacco you might make as much here in one year as you have done since you went to America that is to say if you were inclined to come here or if you had not that while I had a bite you would have the half of it the provisions here are very cheap you can get an hundred pounds of flour for eight shillings beef the same Tea 1/ per pound sugar 2 ½ per pound we use no other thing than beef Tea and bread and to let you see how the man & wife children that I am beside did last year they grew about 4 acres of Tobacco and had about 2 tons and it was counted a very bad year he has sold the one half in Leaf at 8d per pound and the other half he makes it up in the same manner as niggerhead and sells it at ½ per pound I have a sow and two pigs and we get as many cows in as we like to milk I have likewise bought a fillie 2 years old and is getting it broke in Jamie is away out riding with the man that is my mate he is single man and I forgot to say that he pays Jamie a fee for driving the bullocks besides any extra rations that we may use he pays the half the wife washes his clothes and he pay the half of all the soap that is used in the house we need no warm clothing here the only thing that is worn is moleskin Trousers striped shirt and a belt about your waist besides cabbage Tree hat it is winter here now turns a little cold when the sun sets and continues till he rises and when the sun is up it is about as warm as at home in the summer we mostly all live besides rivers here the cultivation is not a ¼ of a mile off the river I live close beside one named the Allyn it takes it's rise about 20 miles further up than where I am and joins along with another river named the Paterson about 20 miles further down where it is navigable it is very mountainous in this part of the country but it is good pasture for cattle and a man that takes a piece of ground for cultivation has a run for so many cattle and bullock about the half of the number of acres he cultivates all for nothing the cultivated land lets at about a pound an acre but there are some places where you may get it cheaper away about thirty miles from us you will get it to buy for the same the blacks here are lazy dirty set of people they will do anything but work they go almost naked having only a bit of blanket thrown over them which they get from government once a year no person need be afraid to come to the bush as they are very harmless we had two of them striping bark for us last week to cover our hut and all they cared for was belly full of meat and plenty Tobacco if I smoked I could get a qtr of a pound weekly for my own use my mate gets that and so does a great many of the hired servants here there is not many snuffers as snuff is very dear so that if you were here you would become a smoker or like me do none of them you can buy colonial wine for about 3/ the gallon Rum 10/ per gallon Brandy 18/ they hold Christmas in the country the same as they do in England I had a very happy hanselmonday along with my present master we had plenty of beef and plum pudding and a keg of good wine we got plenty of peaches and apricots all last summer and made pies of them we bake all our own bread we have got an oven since we came it cost about 12 shillings and bakes our bread with yeast we have likewise to get a tea pot it hold as much as a tea kettle we are getting very busy our ploughing is mostly all done we will sow about 8 acres present week their produce of which averages about 15 bushels to the acre the bushel is about 50 pounds weight so that you see by that I will have **missing paper** are 30 bushels besides planting early Indian corn and likewise taking a crop of the same after wheat is off the ground or if we do not plant corn we can grow potatoes they generally have two crops in the year here we dont begin to plant out the Tobacco till about the month of October and then the strongest of the work commences but it is work that children can do a great deal to it that is by leafing it and pulling the suckers of it I have sent two letters home since I came here giving them an account of the country and how I am getting on and advising William & Andrew to strive to get out they might do well here it is a

country where they will get missing paper and plenty of meat and no taxes to pay when you write you missing paper and if you are receiving any word from them and how you missing paper are all getting on & my last word to William Collier was to join Teetotal and get Will and Andrew to do likewise be sure and write when you receive this and let me what you think about coming here I would like you to come and I would urge on you to come as I think you will never rue it all you have to do is to take ship for Sydney and when you arrive there you will get a steam boat to Maitland for eight shillings when you could remain there by posting a letter to me when you landed and I would come and fetch you it is a fine healthy country every thing is dry and warm here and a very light atmosphere my wife family and I enjoy the greatest of pleasure by coming out here our longest day in summer is from 5 in the morning till about 5 in the evening till there is the evening and our shortest from 7 in the morning till about 5 in the evening we have no twilight. Wednesday evening 30 John I am down at the township a distance of 20 miles from where I live I have come to buy some clothes to the wife and children and all I have to say is this that all that I would like to see is for you to come here for I am sure that you would have a chance to do well for I think by the time that you receive this and the time you would take to come here I will be getting the crop off and you need not care suppose you had not a farthing when you landed as I would do everything that lay in my power for you Dear John I doubt think I will not write you before I receive a letter from you and let me know what you think about what I have wrote you my wife joins with me in sending her compliments to you and joins with me in wishing you to come as you would find that you would have a chance here I must close but John write me and that soon for I am anxious to hear how you are getting on.

I am your affectionate

Brother and Sister

J and J Laurie

### Notes about first page of transcription

James Laurie/Lawrie arrived in Sydney with his wife Jean and five children on the ship "Kate" as assisted immigrants on 23 September 1849. The Assisted Immigration records show the following:

Kate

NAME.	AGES.																			
	MARRIED.		SINGLE.																	
	M.	F.	16 years and upwards.		7 and under 16 years.		4 and under 7 years.		1 and under 4 years.		Under 1 year.									
			M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.								
Laurie	James	38																		
	Jean		34																	
	James					13														
	Elizabeth						10													
	Alexander					8														
	Margaret								4											
	Magdalene																			

He was first employed by William Barker Boydell who owned the property "Caergwle" on the Allyn River at Allynbrook.

James Lawrie then worked with James Towns. In 1852 James Towns and his wife Honora were living at "Combwell" on the Allyn River (Paterson Church of England baptism register). They may or may not have been there in 1850, but "Combwell" later became part of James Lawrie's "Halton" property at Allynbrook, so the connection is likely to be valid.

Indian Corn was the colonial-era name for maize, as distinct from Caffre/Kaffir Corn which is sorghum (the term "Kaffir" is now considered offensive).

### Notes about second page of transcription

In Scotland, Hansel Monday is the first Monday of the year.

### Notes about third page of transcription

The township James visited was Paterson. 20 miles from Paterson would place his residence at Allynbrook, which is consistent with him farming with James Towns on "Combwell", later part of James Lawrie's "Halton" property at Allynbrook.