

The George Brett Letters

1874 – 1878

The following letters were transcribed in the late 1970's when I was a teenager of about sixteen. I was very curious about the past and spent time with my great aunt, Elaine (Brett) Cascadden, pouring over old letters and photographs that she had carefully preserved on behalf of her family. Among her treasures were these letters, which fascinated me. Because I didn't have access to a copy machine, I spent many long hours transcribing George Brett's words, even though I found them somewhat difficult to read due to the oddities of 19th century penmanship. I decided to use a fountain pen since it most closely approximated what George would have used, and I tried to copy George's particular brand of penmanship whenever I couldn't figure out the word. When I returned the letters to Aunt Elaine, I believed that they would always be available should I wish to look at them again.

Years went by and I often thought of those letters but was, regrettably, uncomfortable about asking her if I could have them. When Aunt Elaine was no longer able to keep house for herself in 1995 (at the ripe old age of 100!), she went to live at the nursing home and her possessions were distributed to interested family members. The letters were passed to a relative who expressed an interest in them. When inquiries were later made on my behalf, I was shocked to learn that the letters had been thrown away because the relative couldn't read them.

Although I could still cry about the loss of those letters, this incident has made me realize just how fragile our link to the past can be. If Aunt Elaine had not preserved the letters so carefully for over 70 years, and if I had not transcribed those letters 30 years ago, I would not be able to offer you the following typed copies that have provided so many of the details that I have relied upon in doing this work.

I have tried whenever possible to be true to the original text, but have added punctuation where I deemed it essential for easier reading. George Brett used periods sparingly; I have added some in. There are only a few instances in which I was unable to interpret his writing. I have enclosed suspect interpretations in square brackets with question marks. Small adjustments to spelling have been indicated in square brackets as well.

Laurie Brett

Revised February 2012

Direct W. Geo. Brett
Cornabby
Ballinacarrow
Ballymote
Co. Sligo

Cornabby Ballinacarrow
Sept. 23, 1874

My Dear John,

After your very long silence I received your long expected letter after being detained over two months in Coolaney. I am indeed rejoiced to hear that you & your family enjoy good health as we are all here at present thank God for his mercies to us all. I removed from Mumlaugh to here in the year 1861. I hold 64 acres at £7000 a year. I do not hold the old place in Mumlaugh but I got Patt Davy Ruddys and over to Castletown meaning from W. Wynne about 60 acres in all. I also hold a large farm in Mayo and has Hugh Caue herding there for the last twenty years & more.

Mary & William Sadlur are still alive & in good health. They live at a place called Croughau, six miles above Boyle. They have 4 boys and 3 girls. George is after leaving the police on a pension of £36 a year. He is married and lives down the north. The other three boys are in the City of Philadelphia all going on first rate. Their two eldest daughters are also married. One of them & her husband lives in the house with the old couple. They have over 20 acres of prime land. They are very comfortable.

I now have to let you (k)now that my family was 3 boys & 3 girls. But with regret I must state that poor Mooberry is no more. Died on the 14th of Augt. 66 at the age of 22. You may guess how I feel at writing his name. He was the best young man in the county for a Father. He held at the time of his death 228 acres in Mayo but I gave it up after his death. My eldest daughter Celia is married to a young man of name of Hamilton. They are very comfortable. He has over 100 acres of land. I have two sons & two daughters. My eldest son Robby is 21 years & John 16. I must tell you that Robby is the tallest brite that ever you saw, 6 feet 7 in height and 17 stone weight, as strait as a fishing rod and very active. My oldest daughter Mary is 24 years of age & the younger Cathrine 3 now. I have given you all the particulars about Mary's family and my own.

Dear John you will please let me (k)now how you are circumstanced. Is it by the trade or otherwise you are going on as I will be most anxious to hear how you & your family are going on. I believe your age is about 49 years. I would get your age from the Church registry but the Clergyman is at present in England. I am very proud to hear that all our sisters are still alive & in good health. Remember me most affectionately to Celia & her family. Tell them to write to me. As for Patt the Boy he is not in America but at home. He came home this time six years with £60 and remained until he spend this, most of it in drinking & sporting, then went off again to the states, and remained there with uncle Christy's son in law at Brickmaking until he made up sixty more & started for home again & Began the old trade again. So I had to get rid of him again. He then went to live with Charles Brett of Aconry & stopt there until he fell in fashion with his servant girl & was going to get married to her but was prevented by uncle Patt's two sons. He now stops with young Patt, taking an odd spree. There are very few of the Bretts in this country now. John of Tobercurry is no more this three years. His son rob(b)ed me of £200 after his Father's death. I believe I will never have any chance of it. Many has come to a loss as well as me by them. You wish to hear how all your friends and acquaintances are. Very few of them are now in this country. There are now in Mumlaugh only the two Whultys of Castletown, Jack Gallagher,

Mich(a)el Tote's son Patt and his mother all the time are gone or dead. But Paddy, he is living with me for the last 27 years. All the Lillies are dead or away. Philip Lillie & David & his wife are no more now to be had, only Sally & Elisa who live in Finny Town has only a house & garden. Wm. Sproule is no more. James is in the old place but in very bad health crippled with rumatism. Andy Shannon is in Liverpool as letter carrier. I did not see him this long time. I must now conclude hoping to soon hear from you again. My family joins me in love to you and your family and hopes you are all in good health. I am Dear Brother your affectionate

Geo. Brett

Cornaby Ballinacarrow
Ballymote June 16, 1875

My Dear Brother,

Your letter came to hand which gave us great pleasure to hear that you & your family were in good health as we are here thank God. You will direct your letter as above. It is only three weeks ago I got yours as it is seldom I go to Coolany. I am very proude to see that you are getting on so well & in such respect in that country. Also I feel proud to hear that Celia is so comfortable & having such a nice family. You said she was to write to me soon. I would be glad to gt a letter from her as I would like to have one from herself & her husband. You said you expected to pay Jane & Thos Clark a visit this summer. If so ask them to write to me & let me (k)now how they are going on & how many in family they have. I suppose age is beginning to pray a little on Tom for he is older than I am. Uncle George's family are all living in that quarter. You may see some of them are your way. I believe they are comfortable. I was proud to see by your likeness that you look so young & healthy. Also we all admire your daughters appearances. She is a fine girl of age indeed quite the young woman. As soon as I get an opportunity I will send you the likeness of myself & some of my family. They say as soon as they go to Sligo that we will get them taken. You said that you intend to pay a visit to this country. We will all rejoice to see you. You aught to bring some of your family with you. A trip mite serve ye very much to spend one or two months here. We have plenty of fruit & by the time you would be here good new potatoes also. Mary's son James was here in spring. He is in delicate health. He says he is very rich at all event. He is very proud and consuity [conceited?]. He looked down on every thing he saw in this country. However he left here & went to the north. We heard nothing of him since he & I could not agree on many points. I think his Father was not much the richer of his visit. James got your address from me. He is to write to you. William Sadlur is in very delicate health. Mary is quite healthy. All her sons, only [except?] George, are in that country, but she is very little the better of them. Her second daughter is married & living in the house with them. George is out of the police on pension, married & living in the north. I do not [k]now what business he follows as he never writes to me. As for my own part I am going on as usual ratting away. I met with some losses this year. I lost a horse that I refused £50-0-0 for & a few bullocks, but I have half a score always of young horses & four score of cattle and a good many sheep. With kind regards to your Mrs. & family, I remain your affectionate brother,

Geo. Brett

Cornabby Feb'ry 23, 1876

My Dear John,

Your letter of the 27th of Sept. came to hand in due co[u]rse. I would have answered it sooner but I intended to go up to Mary's in order that I mite give you all particulars about her & her family. Foot & mouth disease set in among my cattle in Mumlaugh which gave me great an[n]oyance through the winter. They are all well now. I am happy to let you [k]now that I lost none of them. Mary was here on a visit last August. She is in good health, her circumstances fair as all her sons are in America. She was obliged to get her second eldest daughter married to a young man of the name of Monson & give him the farm. Her youngest daughter is yet unmarried living with them. They are comfortable living on about 22 acres of very good land at a fair rent. James Sadler was home last April. He paid us a short visit here & promied to come again after he would return after spending a few days with his brother George in Derry, but he took his departure from there & did not return to bid his mother goodbye. I thought very little Jim. Why he was too impudent. He was never done boasting of his great wealth & what a great amount of property he had in Philadelphia, but to cut the matter short, he was the titest screw that ever came to this country. He did not give his mother the price of one oz. of tea nor his sisters the price of a breastpin. Mary is very little the richer of any of her sons. I am glad to hear that Celia & her family enjoys good health. I expected a letter from them but did not get one yet. I will soon write to them. Let me know if you got any _____ from Catherine & her family. Also if you heard anything about Tom Clarke & his family since you wrote before. As for brother Patt, I fear he will never do much good. He lives with uncle Patt's son. I believe he has nearly his money spent in drink. He does not come near us attal because I would not countenance his folly in the course he was pursuing. He lived with Charly Brett a while & fell in love with his servant mad, a papist. He was put off that & remains an old bachelor. Still Jim Sadler did not care much about seeing him. He said he was ashamed of him when he called to see him on his way coming home as he passed through Philadelphia. I heard lately that he intends to return to America. He did not spake to me the last time I met him. He is angry with me because I would not give him Mumlaugh.

Dear John it is gratifying to us all to hear that you & wife & family are enjoying good health & also to hear of you going on so prosperously. You said you would pay us a visit. Take courage yourself & your wife & come for a few months. It surely would add many years to your lifetimes to pay one visit to the old country. Old & young of us would be very glad to see you both here. My daughter Mary will write to your daughter Celia as soon as she comes home. She is on a visit for the last few days with her sister Celia. It is a long time before since she could spare time for visiting. Celia is very comfortable. Their stock of cattle, sheep & horses are worth £1000. They have four children, three daughters & the youngest a boy a year old. My soninlaw would like to [k]now if your wife's family is from the Co. Leitrim as there are two families of the name.

Very respectable people at his marrying. I have to let you [k]now that Charles of Aconry's first wife died, leaving two children, boy & a girl. He got married again to John Allen of Rathbarrons youngest daughter & got two hundred pounds with her. They live very stylish. He improved his house & place very much. Uncle Christy's Mary is still living an old maid. Celia is married to uncle Patt's son John the umaurder(?) of there are in that country. I feel grateful for all the newspapers you sent me. I take great delite in reading them. They contain an amount of pleasant reading. I sent you a few. Let me [k]now if you get them. If so I will send them to you if you can for reading th_____ rite by return of post & I will promise not to be so dilatory for the future, with kindest regards to old & young

your affectionate brother
George Brett

Cornabby Feb'ry 28, 1878

Dear John,

I read your daughter's letter last week which I was sorry to hear that you were so very unwell & also your Mrs. I hope your next letter will bring to me the good news that ye will both be in better health. We are all well here thank God at present. All my family were glad to hear that sister Cecilia & her husband & family are in good health. It tells well for them that the Lord has spared them to see their grand children to comfort them in their old days.

I am glad to here you expect to come home to pay us a visit. I [k]now it would add greatly to your health to spend a few months in this country & if Cescelia would take courage to come with you we would be very happy to see you both here. I think I would add many years to your lifetime. I am also glad to here from you that Cathrine, husband & family are well & in such good circumstances. It appears Tom Clarke is about coming to that country. If so you will be so kind as to let me know. I am indeed glad to hear that they are in good health. Let me [k]now how many in family they have & how Jane stands that country. I would write to Cescilia but I do not [k]now their address. Jane Sproule got married to a sone of James Davises the shoemaker from Rathbarron. They live in Annaghbeg & has three daughters & two sons. They keep nine or ten cows & a horse. Cathrine got married to a man of the name of Cole from near Sligo. After they had two children the husband died & after remaining four years a widow she again got married to a young man of the name of Borrows by whom she had one daughter. He also died but left her £15.0 [could be £150] a year unlike the daughter [who when she comes of age] will be heir of £500-0-0. I have no more news to send this time but I hope to see you early in summer in better health than you have been lately. Write by return of post as we will be uneasy until we hear from you. With kind regards for all your family

I remain your affectionate brother

Geo. Brett

P.S. I got the Amherstburg Echo & Toronto Globe. I send the papers as usual. G.B.

Cornabby June 11, 1878

My Dear Brother,

I read a letter from your daughter which brough us an account that you are still in a delicate state of health which leaves us all here very uneasy. I hope the Lord in his mercy will soon restore you again. It is indeed gratifying to me to [k]now that she is married with your consent to a respectable steady young man. I hope the Lord will grant them a blessing. I felt very proud when I got a part of her wedding cake though small it appeared. I was able to give a crumb to every member of the family & a taste to a few friends. I hope if the Lord spare you & stren[g]thens you that you will as soon as you are

able to undergo the journey make up your mind to pay us a visit. I am sure it would do you good & we all here would be happy to see you & any of your family that would think well to accompany you. I have to tell you that sister Mary, her son-in-law & family are gone to Philadelphia. They did not let me [k]now anything of their moves until a few days before they left. There is now only her eldest son & eldest daughter in this country. They never write to me & I don't [k]now why as I never gave them any cause to complain of me, always happy to see them when they came to my place & treat them with as much kindness as I could. I would be glad Celia would write to us as we would like very much to know how all her family are. I wrote to Cathrine's husband twice & got no reply. Likely you did not hear since from Tom Clarke. He has quite forgot all his friends in this country. I have let you [k]now that we have up to this a very wet summer, so wet as that work is very backward about here. Still I am not as badly off as some of my neighbours. Brother Patt is still in Scotland. I am told he is going on well & keeping steady & sober & in constant employment. He never writes to me. I am still keeping a good stock of cattle on hand. Cattle are very high in this country at present. I paid £150-0-0 this season for grass in addition to what land I hold here & in Mumlaugh. If [you] come home it will be a days journey to go see them all. I must now conclude with kindest regards for your Mrs. & family. I wish to be respectfully remembered to your son-in-law. Write soon & let me [k]now about what time you will be able to start for the old country that we may be on the look out for you. I will be very uneasy until I hear from you.

I remain your affectionate brother

Geo. Brett

P.S. I feel obliged for the papers. Please send the Amherstburg Echo as I like greatly to read it. G.B.