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Charles C. Rawn's Letter to his Son, Capt. Charles Rawn, April 23, 1865

Edited by Steve Noel

Introduction

A letter from Charles C. Rawn to his son Captain Charles Rawn was found glued in the May 18, 1860 Natural Philosophy Lectures of the Rawn journals (Box 1, Book 27 of the HSDC Collection). This six page letter appears between the entries for April 16-1 and April 18-3. The letter is dated April 23, 1865 and is about a trip taken the previous week to Massachusetts with another son, John Calvin Rawn. This is not the handwritten letter from Charles C. Rawn but a copy, possibly transcribed by Capt. Rawn upon receipt of the original. While the Natural Philosophy Lectures have been transcribed, this letter remained untouched. The following is a synopsis of the context, places, and personalities in the letter followed by the transcription, original copy, Rawn photographs, and other source material.

Time Line for letter

Thursday, April 13 - New York City (visit to Captain Rawn)

Friday, April 14 - New York City to Boston and Andover MA (Lincoln is murdered)

Saturday, April 15 and Sunday, April 16 – Andover (Philips Academy)

Monday, April 17 – Andover to Boston

Tuesday, April 18 – Boston to New York City

Wednesday, April 19 – New York City to Princeton, NJ (Calvin departs)

Thursday, April 20 – Princeton to Harrisburg

Writing Style

There is an obsessive noting of time and distance from one place to another as if Rawn was some sort of explorer to a foreign land taking notes for further study. This might have been years of habit acquired as a practicing lawyer or just a peculiar writing style. As Rawn travels further north he becomes very curious as to the different use of land in New England and the unique village design so at odds with Pennsylvania farm and town patterns. Highlights of the trip for Rawn include notable meals, the large size and uniformity of New England village houses, and the curious lack of street life in these villages. In this sense Charles Rawn treats the trip as a means for social comment on American sectionalism in the Civil War era.

Capt. Charles Rawn

Capt. Rawn was Charles Rawn's eldest son. The first leg of the trip was from Harrisburg to New York City for a visit to his soldier son. Capt. Rawn was stationed at Fort Schuyler, which guarded the entrance to the East River at Long Island Sound. The fort still stands today as a maritime museum at Throg's Neck, Queens Boro. Capt. Rawn was a Civil War veteran in the 7th U.S. Infantry and spent most of his adult life as a commissioned Army officer. Later in his career, Rawn Jr. would serve under George Armstrong Custer in the west and was involved in the campaign to capture the Nez Perce under Chief Joseph while he was stationed at Fort Missoula in Montana Territory.

John Calvin Rawn

The second leg of the trip from New York City to Boston and on to Andover, Massachusetts was all about Rawn's traveling companion, his youngest son John Calvin. The final destination was the Philips Academy in Andover, where Charles Rawn was thinking of enrolling Calvin. After graduating from Harrisburg Academy, Calvin had enlisted in the Lochiel Grays, a Harrisburg three-month unit that served in the Union army doing guard duty along the Potomac River near Washington, D.C. in 1861. Now that the Civil War had just ended, it was time for college. Most colleges and universities at this time had a religious affiliation, Philips Academy being connected to the Presbyterian Church. While the Rawn family were members of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Harrisburg, Charles Rawn had reservations about what he found in Andover. After a two day visit, and to the great relief of Calvin, Rawn decided to enroll his son at Princeton, another Presbyterian institution, where Charles Jr. had matriculated. Calvin Rawn would become a noted engineer, retiring to Harrisburg and dying there in 1926.

Lincoln's Assassination

Charles Rawn was informed of President Lincoln's murder while in Andover. Amazingly enough, he devotes only two lines in the letter to the news. Concurrently, Rawn makes no mention of Lincoln's Funeral Train, which reached Harrisburg from Baltimore on April 21, a day after Rawn returned home. Lincoln's casket laid in state at the Pennsylvania House of Representatives over night and left the next day after a public viewing on a special train for Philadelphia. By this time, Charles Rawn was in failing

health himself and would die in December of 1865. Even considering his frailty, it is curious that such a noted defender of abolition was mute on the passing of the Great Emancipator. Perhaps to contemporaries already numb from the slaughter of the Civil War, Lincoln's death was just the final exclamation point to a national trauma that most people were determined to put behind them as quickly as possible.

The Letter

To Capt. Chas. C. Rawn

Sunday 7 ½ A.M. Home!

7th U.S. Inf.

Harrisburg Apr. 23, 1865

My dear son

You may no doubt feel as though you would like to be informed on the subject of your brothers and my travels and doings after we parted with you in New York, on the 13th inst. [insituate, a legal term meaning "at this time on this date"] Well! that night we occupied your bed at the Dey St. House, and such a bed, and such bed, accommodations for two human beings my peculiar self being one of them and bro. Calvin the other has never before as I remember fallen to my lot to enjoy, and yet we only paid \$2 for the night. Now I suppose you could sleep there comfortably, but it was the mere name of sleeping and resting that night for me. Enough of that! We got up early, of course, and at 6 o'clock before getting breakfast went to the 4th av. cars by the Astor House, and getting to the depot some 2 miles or more from the point of embarkation, got our tickets and our baggage checked, after a large amount of worry, and at 7 A.M. (the cars were not to start till 8 ½) went into a fine eating salon by the depot and took our time on as comfortable a breakfast as can generally be made after that style of doing things. I like the old way of

having plenty of victuals on the table when you begin and eating right through. Well we got to Boston, at about 5 P.M. 236 miles [*end of page 1*] tedious riding, though, by no means an interesting country in appearance. Much of it a wilderness of thickets-scrubby timber, cedars, rocks, and Stone (“Stun”) fences innumerable. Thousands of acres on either side of the road uncultivated and incapable of it, and when here and there you see a small spot of a few acres cultivated you are inclined to look at the house and then at the land and wonder what they do for a living. As a general rule it seems that the people are gathered into villages and pursue trades and occupations for a living and that the thousands of acres of untilled land around them is out of doors in the cold to them, where they don’t see the advantages of turning their labours. There are exceptions to this general description of the character of the country between N.Y. & Boston but it applies strongly to many miles of it as you leave N.Y. and pass on. There is perhaps a larger appearance of cultivation about New Haven, but Barns and Farm Houses are few and far between. The towns seem to be the places sought to make money and you may be assured they go in for it right; that is right straight and make the rule get all you can while the chance lasts. At Boston we rode 1 to 1 ½ miles to what is called the Boston and Maine Rail Rd. depot and at 6 o’clock we were off for Andover, 20 miles distant or so. [*end of page 2*] We got there about 7 and rode almost a mile and a quarter or near it to our quarters at the Mansion House in the vicinity of the Theological Seminaries. Now be it known that the Mansion House is no Hotel but a very large and specially kept boarding house where people resort largely in the summer time to recuperate and feed interestingly. The town if so it may be called covers a space of some 2 miles in length and half that much in width, very large frame houses, 2 and three stories high all painted

as white as the new fallen snow with green venetian blinds presenting a most invitingly cleanly and pleasant appearance. But these houses are 100, 200, 3, 4, & 500 feet and in some ways more than this apart, so that it is a beautiful village with the country in it, and the country with a beautiful town in it, that has some how or other been built out of doors. No barns, pig pens, stables, stores, restaurants, nor any thing of the dilapidated about the place. About the depot it is different but after you leave it, a few hundred yards this is the general character of the place. People are scarce, at least you can't see them, even in or about big houses that look as they would accommodate a hundred, and this is the general character of the houses, large! large!!! to your curiosity, of what for? children are rarely to be seen, you hear no noise of boys and girls-no crying of babies-the impression [*end of page 3*] upon your mind is they aint there. Dogs are scarce. I only saw three and one cat in the place in nearly three days stay. There are seven Sundays in a week, at least as far as appearances might indicate, and the week days have been banished to localities more congenial with their business bustle and variety. The Philips Academy was burned down some time last winter, a fact I did not know till I got to the place, and instruction is carried on mainly by means of private study at your chamber, and recitation at stated periods in classes. I like a place where all the students are brought into assembly at least at stated periods, as in the old fashioned schools, academies, tc. where they all pursued their studies in the atmosphere of each others influence, with advantages to be derived there from that are incalculable, and not to be compensated for by any means by having a class, not the school, only when he goes to recitation. I met Dr. Taylor the Prest. of the Institution at his house on Saturday morning & again in the evening and was at once favorably impressed. It was in the morning at his door just as he, Calvin & myself were

starting down street that the astounding intelligence of the murder of Prest. Lincoln came to us. I will not undertake to describe my feelings nor the deep gloom that settled upon the faces of thinking and feeling men. We remained in Andover from Friday evening to Monday. I had become strongly impressed with the idea on Saturday that we had got beyond our jurisdiction. I became reminded that we had got out of the bounds and influence of old school Presbyterianism, or Presbyterianism in any original or real form and questioned whether it was meet and proper, for any compensating advantages that appeared to turn a Young Mariner, trained up on craft with rudders to them and with proper charts and compasses on board, out on to a new sea, without the appliances but only his recollections of them, to be blown and drifted about by the all controlling influences of winds, soft breezes and rough or gentle currents that he knew nothing about. I thought not. I clinched the question with this old Presbyterian nail and [end of page 4- here there seems to be a missing line because of the glue] without any direct conference with Calvin that it was not the place for him and that Princeton was. If he had been delivered from some heavy condemnation he could not have appeared more relieved than when he learned for certain that he was not to remain there. Our boarding house at Mr. H. A. Bodwell's was of the most perfect and agreeable character in all respects. Chamber superior in all the conveniences desirable and eating of a most excellent kind and agreeable and appetitish variety at all times. I ate there what I never saw or heard of before. Fish-Hash made of Fish and Potatoes tc. got ready the day before cooking, bones of the fish all removed so thoroughly that you never find one. Monday morning we left for Boston. Tuesday morning we left Boston for New York and Wednesday morning we went to Princeton where I bid John [this is Calvin-Calvin's full name is John Calvin

Rawn] a pleasant & satisfied good bye to both of us on Thursday morning. We heard in New York that you had been in the city the day before (Monday) and that you were ordered or to be ordered to New Orleans. I got home at 4 to 5 P.M. the same day I left Princeton and with my present knowledge of the worry and wear of such an ever jostling journey to a man in my present condition of health I would not go over it again, if I had to go in the same ignorance of all the multiplied matters that you must learn in your progress as to times of starting, connections and modes of making them, places of quartering for a few hours or a night tc. tc. for \$200 if for any amount whatever. Such excursions for the benefit of health would [end of page 5] certainly hurry me on to the Final earthly Farewell. We should have visited you at the Fort on our return through N.York but found there were no boats running that day (Wednesday) and hence we had to go ahead to Princeton. Write and let me know whether you expect to move and where. All are well but myself and I am as well as usual and all remember you with much anxious love. Yr. affectionate Father,

Charles C.Rawn

Copy of letter to

Capt. Chas. C. Rawn

7th Reg. U.S. Infy.

Fort Schuyler, N.Y.

April 23, 1865