

## Letters from Henry "Harry" Billups and his wife Agnes Gratton from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania

This is a collection of letters from Henry "Harry" Billups and his wife Agnes Gratton from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. They were sent to Agnes' sister Emily (Gratton) Hall in Derbyshire, England. The first letter was actually written in England on Harry's behalf by Agnes' sister Maria Boswell. They were once in a collection entitled \_\_Agnes and Harry Billups, Letters from America to Emily and William Hall\_\_, at the Derbyshire [England] Record Office, with the Reference Number D2941/2/1/1-35.H, but seem to be there no longer.

I have transcribed the letters as they were written, without correcting spelling or pronunciation. The brackets indicate my best guess at the word in the text, my marginal comments, etc. You can generally tell who wrote the letter by these guidelines: Henry doesn't capitalize "i" and spells "sister" as "Syster" in the greetings, Henry capitalized more than Agnes, and Agnes drops her "h's" and spells brother "Bruther.

The early letters reflect the Billups' enchantment with their new country, "all hills and holes where we are." They stayed with Henry's brother Thomas upon arrival, until they got their own home, "for the houses are all wood here and they're carried here." (Letter 6, Oct 20th, 1873).

Henry would send back coins and other "new world" curiosities to Agnes' younger brother. Once Henry sent back a lightning bug to England saying "this little fly is A curiosity for it lights Every time it Draws its breath. the Natives Call them littinginbugs And thay Sleep All Day And fly About All Nite time many A hundred of them" Letter 3, Aug 4 1873, some spelling corrected.)

Henry never identifies his actual place of employment, but it is some kind of factory, possibly the Wm Mann Manufacturing Co. in Yeagertown. Work seems always to have been scarce, with much talk of half-shifts, weeks laid off and so forth. They had a garden and Henry hunted to supplement their income. (The 1870's were difficult times everywhere.)

There was a lot of discussion about returning to England, either for a visit or temporarily, but they never actually had the money to make the journey. They evidently decided to stick it out in a country where [if Henry went to Indiana with his brother] "i have been [in] this Country long Enuf So that i cood Get 1060 [or 10-60?] Aikers of land free. All it wood cost me is fourteen Dollers for the rittens but i have not Got Enuff to Just Give Me A start. And that is More then England wood Do for A pore man."

All talk of returning, moving to Indiana, or improving their situation ended when Agnes was found to have breast cancer. In Letter 19, dated Jan 26, 1878, Henry says "[all is well here] At present Ondly for My Maggys brest And it is very bad And keep Gettin Wors, but i hope it will be better After a wile, for thire is A Old Docter 12 Miles from us that has Cured lotts of boath Men And Wimen of Cancers And i hop And trust in the man Above that he will Cure My Wife of hers for God Above knows best wot i Should Do withOut her for i Do not" (some spelling corrected.)

In Letter 24, Yeagertown August 17 1878, Agnes writes: "[we had] the Docter to see it and he sad that cud not be cut out for it is lo on the Brast but he thinks the stuf I ham usen will Cure it." Despite everything they tried, Agnes' condition worsened. They soon needed assistance to care for her and the children. She died in March 1880, a year and a half after her last child's birth.

In Letter 33, edged in black, dated Mar 29 1880, Henry says "now i Sit Down to right to you All with A hard foal of Sorrow And Grief" to inform them of his wife's death. In Letters 33 and 34 he tells them of the arrangements for the funeral and burial '[not] in Yeager but in Lewistown it was the Episcopole Church Or the Church Of England Cemetary the best Around hear." And in Letter 35 he proposes the following inscription for Agnes' headstone:

Weep not Deair Husban And friends but be content  
for i to you Was Ondley lent  
The lord had Ondly had His Due  
And very Soon May Call for you

And you Deair Deair Children  
that is left be Hind  
trust in the lord  
And Me you wile find.

There are no more letters. Within a few months Henry was forced to start breaking up the family, placing the

youngest child with his sister Naomi Jackson in Pittsburgh. The daughter Jane was raised there as well, and Harry and his two other sons moved to Philadelphia. One of the sons died there, but the three surviving children were reunited as adults. Harry's grave has not yet been located.

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