

Annie S. Jarratt and Ben L. Drew

[Archive] Correspondence between a Mixed-Race Husband and Wife and the Deadly Diseases affecting their Homes in the 1910s

Jarratt, Virginia / Wakefield, Virginia: 1902-1910

\$2600



A collection of 31 letters from 1902 through 1910 written to and from Annie S. Jarratt and her husband Ben L.

Drew from Jarratt to Wakefield, Virginia. Most letters are near fine, some have light tidemarks.

A collection of handwritten letters to and from a husband and wife living in separate parts of Virginia. Annie S. Jarratt who lived in the eponymously named Jarratt, Virginia, while her husband Ben L. Drew lived in Wakefield, Virginia working as a farmhand. Most of the letters focus on the distance between them and how much they miss each other, “My precious darling... I want to see you now worse than anybody in this world,” while affectionately referring to each other as young boy and sweet girl. Drew was infrequently home and always working, often leading to constant illness. In one letter Jarratt reminds him to take his medicine, “Hope you have been taking the arsenic”. Reflecting the medicinal practices of that period, the couple frequently used arsenic for their illnesses as well as calomel (mercury), to help with their children’s constipation. Jarratt writes to Drew about their daughter’s constipation and that the calomel is helping less. The couple both write to each other about how they are feeling and their fears of small pox, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and typhoid fever. In some letters, Drew has sent money to help pay for needed items around the house as well as for prescription drugs that Jarratt is able to obtain for her children. There is also a letter in which Drew explains how his stomach was pumped, “I swallowed the rubber tube. It wasn’t so bad after all the nurse and Dr. both said I got on with it finely, but I can tell you it is no fun to have 2 feet of tube as large as your middle finger down your throat and see the contents of your stomach pumped out in a glass jar”.

The letters are often centered on sickness and death. Drew sends a letter to Jarratt explaining why he had to shoot a beagle on the farm. There are also a few letters from Drew’s mother, Julia, in which she talks about the death of Drew’s child and morbidly follows up her condolences with a story about how a man threatened to kill another patron’s baby so he’d have “...something to eat on Sunday Dinner”.

While census records indicate that both Drew and Jarratt are identified as "mulatto". Records also indicate that neither could not read nor write, but this is obviously belied by these letters, Drew talks about his desire to read, "I also want to read the Clansman, I see it has been dramatized and played". The couple also seem to embrace their part in the racial hierarchy: Julia Drew talks about her distrust of African-Americans: "You can't depend on Negroes".

An interesting archive detailing the lives and illnesses of a mixed race family and the medicinal practices used during 1902 through to 1910. [BTC#417816]

Wakefield, Virginia.

July 18th 1906.

Dear Miss Annie -

I reached home safely Monday night, though rather late. The afternoon was better for driving, it was some cooler, and our horse stood it very well. Please allow me to thank you for the pleasant visit I had to you, for I did have a most pleasant time, not withstanding the fact that I was sick nearly all the time I was there, have been

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Sunday evening

My dear Bessie,

As you are caged, I flatter myself you will not mind reading even one of my dull old letters, or will have a chat with you this bright, beautiful Sabbath afternoon. You don't know how glad we were to get your card last night. We do hope ere now you are getting better, and that you will soon be well and strong again. We sympathize with you and your loved ones. Am so glad you are at the hospital. That was decidedly the thing for you to do. Dr. was doing what he thought best, but there they are so much better prepared to find the cause of and treat your disease. We have heard from Sister and Susie both since

2
I love you
Tuesday P.M. 2:25:

My own precious darling husband,
Your dear sweet
letter was read twice last
night if I did have to make
up to get it. I was so glad
to hear from you. I was as
"meek as a lamb" and took
every word you said, and
know that I deserved more.
but my darling, you will
never know what this trial
has been to me. Truly I do
try not to worry, and I
know I ought not to do so, but
you know the flesh is weak.
and certainly I ought not to
have let you know how
I felt, but just can't help
my feelings getting the
upper hand of me sometimes
I do try above all things
for your sake, and I hope
I will be more successful

Monday, P.M.
Oct. 4 - 09 -

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my darling wife

Your dear sweet letter was received yesterday P.M. & I was so glad to get it & so thankful to hear that my own precious loved ones were well & getting on all right. I do thank God that He keeps you both well & pray that He will ever protect & keep you both & spare you to me, I am mighty glad to know that every thing is getting on so well. Now I wish I could be with you, my own precious love. I can't tell you how I do miss you, or how much I do love you, for I can't find words to express it. Dr. told me yesterday P.M. that my blood had improved ten thousand or more

to such / I'm sure but I
had much rather
- than - write me exactly
what you think about
it. Come and sleep with
me tonight. I would
like to have a little bit
of you & see and hear
you always, my precious
darling, me. I
want to see you
in my heart
more than
I can say. I'm devotedly,
Annie.

wish I could see my darling
love this very minute. you & I
do love you better than any
thing or anybody in this world.
I just feel like I am bound
to see you before long. tomorrow,
though, I can say. I'm sure.
how glad I will be to see
you. I miss you more this
time than I ever have before.
but then I've staid away
from you longer. I don't
think I'm going to do it
again either. for I get more