

A remarkable small collection of holograph letters, most of which were written in Texas, that document the tragic fate of Andrew Wilson: of his emigration to Texas circa 1869, and brutal murder by hanging on his 450 acre homestead at Centerville in April, 1874.

Wilson purchased the farm in January, 1870 and employed several freemen, most or all of whom had been earlier enslaved under the prior owner. By 1874 he had established successful crops of corn and cotton, and he was raising numerous cattle and hogs. The farm was located about 20 miles from his cousin, the Rev. James Wilson, who “goes past the house once a month to Centerville to preach ...”

The collection consists of six detailed letters and one autograph note dating from the period of Andrew Wilson’s emigration and murder (1867 -74). They consist of two letters and one note by Andrew, two letters by James written in the immediate aftermath of Andrew’s murder on April 3, 1874, one letter by a cousin in Philadelphia, and one by an identified cousin in Illinois. All are addressed to Samuel McCormack, a family patriarch in Ireland. Also included in the collection is an 1885 letter by James that refers to the current status of Andrew’s farm; together with ephemera (two acrostic poems) and three letters by Samuel McCormack dating from 1884-91. One letter is neatly split in half along a horizontal fold, else the letters are about very good or better, with some toning and modest splitting at the edges of a few folds.

The story leading up to Andrew’s murder begins with a six-page letter from 1867, written by a cousin who had established a successful farm at Appanoose, Illinois, in which he gives advice to family members in Ireland, including Andrew, looking to set up a farm in Robertson County, Texas:

“... I don’t think you could find a better place for keeping stock in the world than Texas | there they can live all the year on the grass ... a man can keep all the stock he is able to buy and own no land at all and have nothing to pay for pasture ... it costs nothing to raise cattle in Texas and when they are raised they sell for about one 4th as much there as ours do here. I think wool is a paying business in Texas ...”

The second letter written in 1869 by a cousin in Philadelphia also provides advice concerning Andrew’s intention to emigrate. By January, 1870 he had purchased “a farm of 453 acres” at Spring Creek, Centerville, Leon County:

“... The farm belonged to a doctor and he owned a number of niggers at one time ... There is not many better improved farms in Texas | the cistern is built under the kitchen | the pump is alongside the cooking stove so that there is no water to carry. I am to give 3000 dollars for the place so that I must draw on you for all the money you can send me ... times are good every produce is a fair price | corn is 1 ½ dollars per bushel | I have sold a quantity of corn | I have not sold my cotton yet | I made a good crop last year ... My farm is about 20 miles from James ...”

His second letter from October, 1873 also provides detailed descriptions of his several crops and cattle, and includes more information about the freemen at Centerville:

“... This summer there has been a great revival among the freemen. They carried on their meetings all summer and a great many of them professes to have got religion. They continued their meetings nearly all night and they make the woods ring when they are singing. About five hundred of the freedmen

came to my creek one Sunday this summer and were baptized by immersion, for the Methodists baptize by immersion in this country. There has been some cases of yellow fever in Galveston and it has got up along the railroad but we expect frost about November and the frost generally stops it. I hope it will for there can be no cotton sent down for trains are stopped ...” / “... I live a very quiet life and never think myself lonely ... my Saviour has often come to me and filled my heart with gladness and I have often gone to bed as happy under his protection as if I had a guard of soldiers round the house ...”

His cousin James describes the circumstances of his murder on the night of Friday, April 3rd:

“... none of his friends were with him in the house ... He had removed the freedmen, who worked his land from about his yard to the distances of from a quarter [to] half a mile from his house to houses of their own, who left him at night ... here now Dear Samuel the horrible tragedy has to be told, he was foully murdered for money ... he was missed from home on Saturday morning, but not found until Sabbath about 11 o'clock when the whole community in intense excitement were out on the search. About 300 yards from his house in a dense thicket, the lifeless body was found suspended from a low limb and partly resting on the ground; and strangled by an additional short rope tied tightly around his neck ... There were three horse tracts found where horses had been tied close by the body, and followed from Sunday until Tuesday night amidst great difficulty ... until a heavy rain on Wednesday morning put out the tracks ...” / “... Three men in this county were out Sunday night were tracked on Monday and arrested, but giving a plausible account of their movements, and their horses tracks ... not corresponding ... the three escaped instant hanging by the crowd. If the parties could be identified they would not go to jail but to a limb of a tree ...”

James served as Administrator of Andrew's estate, which he describes in a second detailed letter from June, 1874, and in another follow-up letter from 1885. A compelling and historically important cache of letters that provide a first-hand account of an emigrant's farm in Texas.

A detailed list with additional quoted extracts from the letters follows:

**1. “A – [?] Wilson” to Samuel McCormack
ALS. Octavo. 6pp. Appanoose [Illinois]: November 20, 1867**

“I received your letter yesterday and am truly thankful for the information it contains ... now let us answer your inquires as they are presented: Wheelock, Robertson County [Texas] (not Robinson). I don't think Bob knows much more about farming out here than you yourself | you need not trouble yourself clearing land or digging up stumps | there is millions of acres of land all over the west and southwest all clear and nice and ready for plowing and fencing, this is what we call Prairie land and it is richer and better for farming, than timbered land ... and the government price of land is never more than \$1.25 per acre ...”

[pp. 3-4] “... My land is worth \$40 per acre now. I bought it ten years ago for \$6 and so it will be with other places as they settle up. I don't think you could find a better place for keeping stock in the world than Texas | there they can live all the year on the grass | it is pretty hot in summer but never cold in the winter | a man can keep all the stock he is able to buy and own no land at all and have nothing to pay for pasture ... / ... I had a letter from an acquaintance in Texas ... I apprehend the cheapest rout to

Wheelock, Robertson county Texas is by New Orleans or better still if you could find a vessel bound for Galveston Texas then by rail to Austin and then by stage the balance of the way ...”

[pp. 5-6] “the cost of improving prairie land depends on the distance from timbered land and its abundance / it costs nothing to raise cattle in Texas and when they are raised they sell for about one 4th as much there as ours do here. I think wool is a paying business in Texas. I would advise you to keep away from New Orleans in the summer season the yellow fever might [?] you | if you go up the Mississippi river to New Orleans it is 100 miles from the gulf, you will have to go right down again in another vessel bound for Galveston ... Texas is about as England, Ireland, and Scotland ... George Singleton has a brother who was in Australia ... Andy do pretty well in Australia | if he has considerable money he can do well in this country but I would not advise him to come | but if he or any of my relations should ever travel this way I would be glad to see them and give them a welcome and free quarters ... tell John that his visit to Ill. and mine to Texas fissioned out ...”

2. Robert McCormack to Samuel McCormack
ALS. Octavo. 4pp. Philadelphia: June 7, 1869

“... If cousin Andrew wishes to come to this country, he cannot fail of success if he has good health, and money to stock, and fence a farm, for by a late act of congress anyone can have land in any of the Territories, gratis, on condition of residing 4 years on the place and clearing 10 acres ... I believe Texas is going to be a fine place ...”

[p. 2] “Texas at one time (being on the border) was looked on as a refuge for men of the baser sort ... but the state of things are in a good degree changed. James Wilson still resides in Texas but I don’t know his address; Samuel came to Philadelphia a few months since to marry an old sweetheart, a Miss Robinson. He told me James was going to get married, to a widow I think. Samuel has a good farm, so has his brother [&] so has Rebecca’s husband. Illinois he says is very cold in the winter ...”

[p. 3] “... the patient farmer is sure to succeed ... I have been thinking Dear Samuel if you were here you might succeed either on your own account or in partnership with John who would wish to try some thing as he is now a young man ... Mary Ann assists her mother at home, Rebecca is still at the Millinery business in Chestnut St. ...”

[p. 4] “... Business is not brisk at present ... If you make up your mind to come out I will do what I can for you and Mary. I don’t think you need have any fear ...”

3. Andrew Wilson to Samuel McCormack
ALS. Octavo. 4pp. Bryan [Texas], January 26, 1870

“... I have bought a farm of 453 acres | there is a fine house and other buildings ... The farm belonged to a doctor and he owned a number of niggers at one time ...”

[pp. 2-3] “There is not many better improved farms in Texas | the cistern is built under the kitchen | the pump is alongside the cooking stove so that there is no water to carry. I am to give 3000 dollars for the place so that I must draw on you for all the money you can send me ... times are good every

produce is a fair price | corn is 1 ½ dollars per bushel | I have sold a quantity of corn | I have not sold my cotton yet | I made a good crop last year | land is going up in price every day ... My farm is about 20 miles from James | he goes past the house once a month to Centerville to preach ... I have bought 125 acres along side of James | there could be a good farm made on it.”

[pp. 3-4] “... tell Wm. McCormack that this is a good country for any one that has good health and can work but there is now fortunes to be made ... Andrew Wilson Spring Creek, Centerville, Leon County, Texas, America”

4. Andrew Wilson to Samuel McCormack

ALS. Quarto. 4pp. Spring Creek, Texas, October 24, 1873

[With a later manuscript note: “Written over because fading, Dec. 27, 1896, Maggie McC [Cormack] / Letter addressed to Samuel McCormack, Omagh - Ireland.”]

“... Texas is well read of Wm. McCormack, for I believe had he stayed twenty years here he would not have added one bale of cotton or one bushel of corn to the wealth of the state. He is in debt to me 12s/6 that I paid the man that brought up his boxes from Bryan, and one pound that I paid to bring him. I wish him to pay the amount over to you ...”

[p. 2] “We are gathering in the crop – we would have had a very abundant crop of cotton but the cotton worm came in August and eat all the leaf off in two weeks ... so that we will fall short several hundred bales of cotton this year. I have 16 out of last years cotton that I did not sell ... / ... there has been a great many sick and some sudden deaths – I have great cause to be thankful ... there is good grass in the woods and cattle are very fat. I have very fat beef cattle but can only get from 10 to 12 dollars for head of them. I slaughtered one and sold the meat at 2 ½ cents per lb. at that price one will bring 18 dollars ... there is a good many acorns on the trees ... I think the hogs will get fat on them ... there is no trouble in selling pork ... everything is well with me. I leave my doors and windows open ...

[pp. 3-4] “... I am sorry to inform you that there is a great breaking up in our church at Read land this year. We got a crusty old preacher ... there was charges brought against several of the members for dancing and some for dram drinking ... This summer there has been a great revival among the freemen. They carried on their meetings all summer and a great many of them professes to have got religion. They continued their meetings nearly all night and they make the woods ring when they are singing. About five hundred of the freedmen came to my creek one Sunday this summer and were baptized by immersion, for the Methodists baptize by immersion in this country. There has been some cases of yellow fever in Galveston and it has got up along the railroad but we expect frost about November and the frost generally stops it. I hope it will for there can be no cotton sent down for trains are stopped.

[p. 4] “... I live a very quiet life and never think myself lonely ... my Saviour has often come to me and filled my heart with gladness and I have often gone to bed as happy under his protection as if I had a guard of soldiers round the house. Tell that forgetful niece of my sister Margaret that I forget when I had a letter from her ...”

5. James Wilson to Samuel McCormack (re: murder of Andrew Wilson, April 3, 1874)
ALS. Quarto. 4pp. Centerville [Texas], April 13, 1874

“Your letter to Andrew of March 19th is in my possession, received out of the Post Office on Saturday and opened by me, as Administrator of his Estate. You will see him no more on this earth ... His death occurred on the night of Friday April 3rd ... none of his friends were with him in the house ... He had removed the freedmen, who worked his land from about his yard to the distances of from a quarter half a mile from his house to houses of their own who left him at night and came back early in the morning to find their workhorses in his lot, as he supplied to them both horses and feed. They of course missed him early on Saturday morning. ... In his own neighborhood ... he had within the past two years made many friends and specially the members of the church ... of this I was well aware ... from the members of our Centerville Presbyterian church who lived in this neighborhood ...”

“But not only in his neighborhood and among the religious classes of the community ... but far and wide among all classes his death has created the interest of any that has ever occurred ... here now Dear Samuel the horrible tragedy has to be told, he was foully murdered for money. As I have already said he was missed from home on Saturday morning, but not found until Sabbath about 11 o'clock when the whole community in intense excitement were out on the search. About 300 yards from his house in a dense thicket, the lifeless body was found suspended from a low limb and partly resting on the ground; and strangled by an additional short rope tied tightly around his neck. ... There were three horse tracts found where horses had been tied close by the body, and followed from Sunday until Tuesday night amidst great difficulty ... until a heavy rain on Wednesday morning put out the tracks ...”

[Wilson later dispatches a second tracking party of two men to find the killers:] “in Madison Co to which the parties were traced and see if they can find whose shoe and horseshoe may correspond and was out of the county at the time of the murder ... Three men in this county were out Sunday night were tracked on Monday and arrested, but giving a plausible account of their movements, and their horses tracks ... not corresponding ... the three escaped instant hanging by the crowd. If the parties could be identified they would not go to jail but to a limb of a tree ... His watch is gone ... I have his purse of \$39 found concealed in the house, which will about pay his funeral expenses ... He was buried when I got here ...”

“There was a general impression everywhere that he had a great deal of money, and he was partly to blame in this respect ... He told me he would give you what he had were he to die, | Make the sad news know to his brothers and sister, and let some one come out with power of attorney signed by them all to act for them and take this business out of my hands / I have applied for letters of administration to the court ...”

6. James Wilson to Samuel McCormack
ALS. Quarto. 4pp. Bryan City [Texas], June 8, 1874

Later manuscript note: “Written to Tattykeel, Ireland by Rev. James Wilson ... cousin to the Andrew Wilson of whom he writes & to my father Robert McCormack.” Condition note: split in half along the center horizontal fold, and partially split along two vertical folds.

“... I think it wise for some one to come out here and take the Estate out of Court by the middle of September ... Power of Attorney would do this, of if Fleming buys let there be as many of the family together as you can conveniently assemble | let them make oath that they (giving the names of all the heirs) are the brothers & sister of Andrew Wilson of Leon Co., Texas deceased and there is none else but who are legally entitled to any part in his Estate ... and let there be a renunciation of their right to their part of the Estate ... made to Fleming or William or as Fleming deems best ...”

“There are notes and mortgages to the value of \$500, and 9 bales of cotton, unsold | \$300 of the \$500 is secured by mortgage and on good men, some more is good but other part is good for nothing mostly on negroes.”

[p. 4] “... The land he bought in our neighborhood I would rather say little about as after making the contract he never went back to see about it, and paid nothing on it. The Sovereign ranges here at about \$4.84 as exchange is for or against Great Britain amounting to about one cent more or one cent less on the Sovereign. I presume you are correct as to the import of his leaving you his money as I did not understand it at the time, and thinking it implied distrust of his brothers did not like to ask him. The horrid murderers are still at large and unknown ...”

7. Note from Andrew Wilson to Samuel McCormack (circa 1873-74?)

Autograph Note, Signed. Quarter sheet

“Dear Samuel | If you would think of giving up your farm I would like you and Mary would come and live with me. I have a good large house and I don't think I will ever marry | so we could spend our days together and have plenty to live on – send me all the news you can about old Tattykeel / Andrew Wilson”

8. James Wilson to Samuel McCormack

ALS. Octavo. 2 sheets (rectos). Macey [Texas], January 5, 1885

Dear Cousin Sam

“... I do not think I would enjoy a visit back to Ireland because I would be a stranger in a strange land | nearly all my acquaintances are gone in over 40 years. Here I have lost so many dear friends ... There is still something behind of Andrew's Estate, but I have collected nothing lately | will try to close up this fall if I can. I have not been to Centerville in more than a year but expect sometime during the coming year to be over there ...

Samuel McCormack to Maggie McCormack (1882-91)

Two letters & two autograph poems (acrostics) by Samuel McCormack (1882-84); and one other letter from 1891.

[BTC#425899]



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Bryson January 26th 90

My dear Samuel (The Cornock Tattghell Orange Island)

I received your welcome letter yesterday with you wrote the six of December I do not know what could detain it so long I was beginning to think that you had all together forgotten me but I am glad to see by your letter that you and Antie Green has not I am also glad that you are all well I see that there has been some changes taken place since I saw you I expected some thing of that sort I would be very glad to be present at your meeting to hear the dialogue about the poor pilgrim. But I must be absent on that night as I have bought a farm of 453 acres there is a fine house and outbuildings if they could not be put up for 2000^{dollars} the farm belonged to a doctor and he met a number of niggers at one time

Written over because of fading
Dec. 21, 1896
Maggie MacC.

Text as

Spring Creek. Octob 24th 73

My Dear Samuel

{ Letter addressed to Rame McCormick
Omaha - Ireland (Maggie MacC.)

I was thinking that there was something the matter with you when you was so long writing to me. I had almost forgot what I suffered with my fingers this time last year, but reciding what you suffered reminded me of the nights that I walked about with my fingers to my feet got inflamed, for I think that I suffered more than any person. I find that turpentine and salt will stop any beeling at first the salt to be kept wet with the turpentine. Texas is well read of Wm McCormick for I believe had he staid twenty years here he would not have added one bale of cotton or one bushel of corn to the wealth of the State. he is in debt to me 12⁰⁰ 6⁰⁰ that I paid the man that brot up his boxes from Bryan, and one pound that I paid to bring him. ~~_____~~ I wish him to pay the amount over to you. your receipt will be a full discharge from the debt; you can dispose of the money in acts of charity. I wish you to get it as soon as you can for he will not be long that he is ready for the poorhouse. I wish you to give him this letter to read.