

LAWTON

Sunday Afternoon

25 November 84

*It took just "a few days"  
to get all this together  
and to the post office.*

Dear Robert,

Having within the last several months lapsed into such an unpardonable state of dereliction with my correspondence, I am quite frankly (and appropriately) ashamed to write you. Although there is no excuse whatsoever for my "epistolary negligence," I shall never the less at least offer you two explanations (one firm, the other feeble) for being so remiss in staying in touch, and answering your marvelous letters, which are always so warm, interesting, informative and delightful to read.

Your first letter, dated 13 September and mailed to my previous address, was an "Aeneas Africanus" of a missive that seemed to have arrived everywhere else **first** in Horry County, before reaching me **finally**--or so I surmised, upon examining all the criss-cross of "**FORWARD TO**" instructions scribbled on the envelope. For some reason, it eventually wound up at Northside Pharmacy, my present landlord's place of business, where it lay (amidst a large and ever-increasing bundle of other mail) for well over a month. At last, someone at the pharmacy took note of this accumulating mail and mentioned it to Johnny (my landlord), who dropped it by The South Wind Motel, where I work after school.

Have you ever attempted to plough through a six-week's backlog of correspondence--which consisted, for the most part, of lengthy, and/or detailed items such as occur in genealogical research and "relative exchanges" thereof? Ever since receiving this big "bale" of correspondence, I've been flapping around like a one-armed wallpaper-hanger, trying to figure out a way to answer all of it--and with very limited success, as I am confident you will attest. *Owell* and anyway, that's what happened in the case of your **first** letter.

In the cases of your second and third letters, I can but meekly plead, **Mea Culpa**. They arrived at Socastee without any problem--other than the problem of my having for so long allowed them to remain unanswered, that is.

Actually, I have on a number of evenings sat down and attempted to respond to your wonderful genealogical "cornucopias," but must truthfully confess that, since moving, I have had the focus and bearings of a chicken with its head lopped off. As you know, it is impossible to correspond on genealogy without ready, organized notes, files, charts, etc., and mine are still anything and everything **but** ready and organized. Then, working until 9:00 seven nights a week after school has also taken its toll on my erstwhile calling and commitments--but now that the golfing season is finally winding down, I will soon be able to bid The South Wind "Aloha" for a few months, and return to concerns of kith and kin.

Well, that's enough "gwinein' an' gwinein'" about why my correspondence has been so lousy lately. What I now intend to do is remediate that problem by responding to your last three letters, in as many particulars as time permits, beginning with the 13 September letter. First, however, let me mention the accompanying xeroxed items.

Please note a number of enclosures, the first of which is a potpourri of odds and ends I received last August from David Nixon, a Milam descendant from Conway, Ark., with whom I very briefly corresponded prior to my move. I may have already mentioned this fellow to you--and, if so, I hope I haven't previously mailed you copies of this mélange of material, for it is certainly not something I should care to fossick more than once. For **my** needs ("Diataphus Dearest"), none of this information was useful--though I very much appreciated David's thoughtfulness and generosity in sending it to me. Perhaps you and Miss Cora will have better success with it than I did. Do let me know what (if anything) you find.

The next enclosures consist of some random tidbits of information from Laurens-- a few of Mrs. Brownlee's gleanings. It is quite possible that you have long before now anticipated her suggestions and leads, and have followed through with them, but I am sending you copies of everything she sent anyway, just in case. As you well realize, "whole ancestors" often suddenly and unexpectedly "swirl into clear ken" on the merest margins of miscellaneous minutiae. Mrs. Brownlee repeatedly assures me that my D. M. will more than likely "occur" just so--if ever at all. There comes a time in research when one must "peel the parings." "Milamly speaking," you and I have arrived at that time.

I was (and still am) thoroughly delighted with the Oswald and collateral data you sent to me back in September--as I was with the new and totally unexpected Peebles connection, which I would most certainly have been **months** in finding out about, were it not for you. Perhaps during the Christmas holidays (20 December-2 January here) I can explore this line a bit further, though I really doubt there will be sufficient time to "do the line justice" until this summer, when my schedule is more relaxed. As for the book you mentioned, **PEEBLES ANTE 1600-1962**, please reserve a copy for me, particularly if my Margaret Peebles' lines are traced in it. I would send you a check for it right now, but you would then send it, and I would then immerse myself in it, and become even **more** derelict in my correspondence, so--simply reserve one for me to read later.

Thanks entirely to you, the maternal "trunk" of my "Beaufort Branch" (the chart of my great-grandmother, Sarah Adelaide Sams) is burgeoning beautifully--and with such down-to-the-last-detail completeness! As I have mentioned to you before, she (SAS) is my "je ne sais quoi," favorite forebear. I so envy all the people still living (and there are a goodly few left) who actually **knew** her, and I will never be able to believe that I "missed" her by a (genealogically speaking) "mere" 12 years. But I am digressing, and being egocentric to boot, so let me return to the primary purpose of this letter,

namely, answering **your** letters--though at the rate I'm going, I'll have time for only your first one at this sitting.

On the matter of the trials and tribulations of being a Milam descendant attempting to "Re-scend" his way back to an ornery ancestor via a maze and welter of DAR doodledy-squat details and dickering, I commiserate with you sincerely and to the nth degree, as I am certain you already know. Our mutual and "congenital" "Milamitis" is our "Laurens Charleston"--Capt. William all over again. Rest assured, however, that Mrs. Brownlee fully intends to keep you and Miss Cora ever in mind as she minutely and meticulously follows the "spoor" of **my** elusive (and **very** aptly yclept) progenitor "Dodge." She is "cementedly" tenacious when it comes to "hanging in there." I have known her to contact a client of **years** past with a hastily scribbled comment such as, "Got 'im! Your ggg-grandfather's last name was Zeigler, son of Obidiah and Rebecca (Pearson) Zeigler, all three buried at....etc., etc." It well may be that Mrs. Brownlee may drop you and Miss Cora just such a bolt from the blue. ("Casual thunderclaps" delight her, especially when she "causes" them.) Please don't give up on DAR--and for goodness sake don't withdraw Miss Cora's application. Bide your time--and in the meantime, just relish the thought of the delicious delight you will perhaps someday derive from being able to cram **reams**--generation after generation of it--of **PROOF** down their throats.

As for your quandary concerning exactly (and tactfully) how to respond to Ed Milam, I know precisely what you mean. He is such a sincere and kind-hearted person, but in no way a research "realist." In **attempting** to respond to his last letter, I found myself "drooling dilemma." What does one gracefully say to his quantum speculations, that quite literally beggar description? I could no more tell a child that his deftless finger-paintings were not art, than I could point out to Ed what his "findings" **really** are--and so I have not yet responded to his last letter. Ironically, though, it may ultimately be just such a one as he who untangles the Gordian Knot of our Milam ancestry:

We're in the serendipity rows,  
Where experts are amateurs--  
Amateurs--pro's.

Remind me sometime to tell you about how the enigma of Elizabeth "Burt," the second wife of my ancestor Bonum Sams, was finally resolved. It's a perfect illustration of what we will probably encounter before our Milam mess is sorted out, but I'll save it for later, when I am not in such arrears with my correspondence.

Your innocent and ill-fated intrusion into the situation of the "shacked-up great-grandfather" made me laugh out loud--and at the same time reflect on some of my teaching experiences, two of which I shall share with you. If you think the **older** folks are up to some shocking shenanigans, you should step for just a few moments into the "fast lane," and see what the "jet set" is up to.

One morning last year a young "lady"--a truly very attractive, intelligent, well-mannered and obviously (at least to me) well-bred student--came rushing and panting into my first-period English class about 20 minutes after the tardy bell had rung. Before I even had an opportunity to ask why she was late, she "explained" (though she "more at" actually **announced**), "Please don't yell at me for being late, Mr. Lawton. My boyfriend forgot to set our alarm." Naturally, I didn't have the breath left in me to yell anything to **that** statement. I didn't even have enough sense to breathe the air with **which** to yell. I simply stood there and more or less mentally "evaporated" with "stun."

On another occasion last year, while calling the roll, I received this "intelligence" from one of my students, upon inquiring the whereabouts of another "young lady" who did answer to her name: "She won't be here today or tomorrow. She's in Charleston getting an abortion." When I instantly scathed the student verbally for uttering such a crass and callous comment, several others piped in to his defense--more or less to this effect: "Well, that's where she is. Everybody knows it--and you **did** ask. Her **parents** took her."

The above incident occurred on a Thursday. The following Monday, I walked the absentee with a "blue slip" (an excused absence), and the following explanation--which I **assure** you was unsolicited: "Mr. Lawton, I know you're upset because I missed my grammar test last Friday, but I was pregnant, you see, and my boyfriend broke up with me when he found out, so I had to go Charleston to see a doctor about, you know, getting everything straightened out, and they told me in attendance that this absence wouldn't count as one of my unexcused days, since I **was** in a hospital and seeing a doctor, so do I get to make up the grammar test?"

Ordinarily, I am an extremely compassionate and understanding person--one **must** be, if he is to teach--but this thing so far exceeded my heart's ability to encompass it that, before I even realized I was telling her, I had **told** her:"I'll give you the same chance to pass this class that you gave your child to live his life. My classroom is not an extension of an abortion clinic. I utterly reject your 'excuse' in this matter, and furthermore advise you to deal directly with the superintendent himself, if you have any intentions of **insisting** upon your so-called 'human rights.'" Fortunately, she did not pursue the matter, for I would never have backed down, and the whole thing would surely have wound up in court.

Well, I believe that about covers your first letter--or at least it does to the best of my ability to respond to it, with such materials as I have readily at hand. I'll get this bundle off in the mail this afternoon when I go to work, and get busy with your second letter when I get home tonight.

As always, give Miss Cora my regards, and expect to hear from me again within the next week.

As ever,

*Paul* L. Lawton