

William Swetland-Man of Eloquence and Passion

William Swetland was a noted attorney, businessman, and resident of Plattsburgh during the 1800s. In 2005, CCHA received a generous donation of a collection of letters and papers from Edward English that belonged to Mr. Swetland. This collection has recently been catalogued and indexed as a community service project by Elder Kenneth and Sister Ada Bills during their tenure in Plattsburgh as senior missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We have delighted in becoming acquainted with this man, his family, and a few business associates, along with enjoying a unique glimpse into their history.

Scholarly biographies of Mr. Swetland have been previously published, of note the 1997 Antiquarian, *William Swetland (1782-1864) As Revealed by his Papers*, Michael S. Rubin, therefore, the focus of this article will be to share some of the eloquence and passion of Mr. Swetland and a few others as revealed in excerpts and transcriptions from the donated letters. This collection is but a small portion of the correspondence produced over his lifetime, with other items being found in the Kent-Delord house collections. This is in consequence of the Swetland and Delord families being combined with the marriage of William Swetland and Betsy Delord subsequent to the deaths of Henrietta K. Swetland and Henry Delord.

The donated collection will be housed in the Special Collections at Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh, where it will be available to the public, with the Clinton County Historical Association retaining ownership.

The Swetland and Kirtland families had relocated from Connecticut to Granville, New York around 1800. After graduating from Middlebury College, Vermont, William returned to Granville and studied law under Zebulon Shepherd from 1808 to 1811. During this time, his friendship with Henrietta Kirtland blossomed into deep love. Before their marriage in November 1811, they experienced lengthy separations from each other. She traveled to Connecticut in particular to visit family, while he obtained a law partnership in Plattsburgh. He was an avid writer with beautiful script until constrained by health impairment in the latter part of his life. Henrietta was not a frequent writer for reasons that are not entirely clear, though she did have extended periods of illness, and her penmanship was to say the least lacking.

Letters in the early 1800's were written, then folded and sealed with the recipient's address on the outside. William had asked Henrietta's father to provide a cover letter for him to avoid the impropriety of writing to a young lady directly.

North Granville, Dec 20, 1810

My very dear girl,

I begin my letter on this page of the sheet intending to call at your house this evening, and persuade your father to write on the first page so that the letter may be directed to you by him, with his name on the outside as postmaster. One reason for this proceeding is that I expect to tax your patience with a very long letter, containing two or

more sheets closely and finely written (meaning by finely written in a small character). Now Dear Girl do not be alarmed, you may have your own time for reading the letter, I will not compel you to go through with it at one sitting.

The resulting letter was long indeed, ten pages of passionate prose and yearning.

North Granville, January 15, 1811

My very dear girl,

Had any person told me a month past that so long an interval would have elapsed between my writing to you, as had transpired since I wrote you last, I should with indignation have declared them to be false prophets—told them they were liars—but what I would never have previously believed has in fact come to pass—thus blind and ignorant are we short sighted mortals of future events—(Well done, there is a grammatical error I perceive in my first sentence, but I'll be hanged if I will alter it now—so criticize my dear if you please, but hush ye, let love dictate the criticism)

He justifies the delay in writing with a discussion of work schedule and chastens her for failing to write to him.

It is now 3 months since you left Granville and I have received but one letter from you. Now say my dear girl, I appeal to you, is it kind when you know with what ardor I grasp at every thing from your hand and what a severe and almost insupportable trial your absence occasions to my feelings.

Henrietta was the eldest of her many siblings and appears to have a close relationship to her sister Lucy, four years her junior. William and Lucy at times appear to have a more strained relationship, and she often referred to him as “the Count”. He continued the previous letter, but again circumstances prevented its completion.

January 19, 1811

I will endeavor in great haste to file this letter and send it if possible. I hope the mail carrier will break his sleigh so that I may get to the post office before he arrives. I believe from some circumstances that Lucy intends to be a little trickish as the saying is, merely to make herself some sport—and that she has written you some egregious fibs about me. If so I will be even with the trollop.

William often signed his letters to Henrietta with the pen name “Philalethes”, one definition it being “lover of truth,” and may be a reflection of his association with literary societies or the Masons.

South Granville January 24, 1811

My Dear Girl,

I wrote you last week and then engaged to write you again this week. “Punctual as lovers to the destined hour”, I now sit down to fulfill my engagement. It affords me pleasure to write to you. It gives me much greater pleasure to receive a letter from you,

and how almost infinitely superior to both would be the felicity of seeing you, that is should I meet you with heart unchanged and love and mind the same. Indeed, indeed I have become impatient when I look forward and survey the interval that will probably intervene before I again see you and press to my heart the long absent object of its still unabated affection, the time seems tedious and dreary indeed—it appears in prospect like an age of solitary cheerless wretchedness. Never before did I so fully realize the truth of the proverbial saying that “time seems long and hangs heavy in the absence of dear and valued friends.”

He continues his letter with response to Henrietta’s inquiry about her sister Lucy who appears to have a number of suitors.

P—y [sic] is now very attentive to Lucy. His visits are frequent and long. Indeed, sparking as the saying is, is now carried on at your house to a greater extent than it ever has been before since the days and achievements of C.F. (you know who I mean I guess). P—y appears to be very fond of Lucy and I am inclined to believe that she is much pleased with him. Judging from their actions and other circumstances I should conclude that matrimony was their object, and that it had been already determined upon—if not their conduct is very indiscreet.

The custom of incorporating locks of hair into personal items was also a focus in this letter.

I send you enclosed agreeable to your very gratifying request some locks of my hair. The long hair was cut from my head several years since—it appears to retain its life and softness, but my hair since that time has grown darker. The short lock is also my hair just taken from my head. The long hair will answer to go round the arm or wrist and the short hair to be put in the seal. I shall receive it my dear as a flattering compliment, and an instance of very pleasing kindness in you to have my hair placed in any ornament you may procure. I very much regret it is not in my power at present to defray the expense of obtaining those ornaments and some others. I should do it with great pleasure and alacrity. But I cannot do it now without inconvenience for I must soon make a journey to Albany and remain there several weeks which will be very expensive. It is my intention my Dear to send you some money before you return to dispose of for certain purposes which I shall mention at the time. If you do not wish to make use of the long hair at present you may preserve it if you please for another occasion.

Henrietta did respond occasionally to William’s pleading for letters from her, though she thought some of his demands were a bit excessive.

Fairvale August 2, 1811

My dear sir,

Give me the happiness of thinking that your heart is too kind to cherish resentment at the late date of this letter. That I am obliged to plead guilty to the charge of negligence to you is not a small mortification, but don’t think too seriously of so very a trifle as a poor letter from me, not so soon received as it should have been. I am confident that, had I the

power of giving you a polite and elegant account of all my reasons and excuses for not writing sooner I should obtain a generous pardon my dear friend.

She continues to assure him of her regard, and reminds him of their previous experiences together. The greater portion of the letter tells of her travels over the previous two months.

I arrived safe in New York on the 31st May. Found Lucy there and all well. The passage was very unpleasant having for a half day very strong head wind. I was frightened and sick enough. I assure you we had twenty ladies on board and all but one sick, it was very distressing.

I was determined not to be pleased in New York but I found it very different from the idea {I} had formed of it. I shall not attempt to give you a description here but have till a more favorable opportunity.

We left 13 July (Saturday), arrived in Troy 16th (Tuesday morn). We had a delightful time, it was beautiful to sail long the blossoming banks of the Hudson and catch in my own eye the fancifully wider beauties of nature as they spread themselves before you in a grand succession. —to view the flowering villages presenting the lively pictures of busy industry and frolic quite, and to contemplate the elegant mansions of rural retirement.

I was in Troy from the 16th to the 26th. Spent my time pleasantly and should have enjoyed it more had my health been good, but I had a very severe cold, and for a great part of the time was unable to go out at all.

She concludes with another page of details about being with friends and family and her desire to see him, which she hopes will be soon.

By the fall of 1811, William had secured his first law partnership and had moved to Plattsburgh.

Plattsburgh, September 7, 1811

My dear Girl,

Believing, fondly believing that you will be anxious to hear from me, I seize the first opportunity although I have but a moment to write. I am under the necessity of writing to John C Parker on business, my intention is to send by the steamboat which passes here this day, and enclose this letter in the one to him. You need not feel unpleasantly at this proceeding, Parker will not mention the circumstance, he is very friendly to me, besides remember he and I are brother Masons—they never betray each other.

I had a safe passage and a very pleasant and expeditious one—pleasant excepting I could not sleep, the beds were so full of bugs. I placed 3 chairs and tried to sleep on those but succeeded poorly—at 2 o'clock at night I arrived at Cumberland Head—found the stage from Plattsburgh waiting—got into it and arrived at my office between 3 & 4 o'clock—thus making but about 20 hours from the time I left your house till I opened my own office door—a distance of more than 100 miles.

He continues his letter and with passion states he is more certain than ever that his future happiness can only be assured if she is with him.

Plattsburgh September 14, 1811

My only dear Girl,

I wrote you last week in very great haste, and am compelled to do the same this week for the stage starts in a short time to meet the steam boat at Cumberland Head. I am very much vexed at his circumstance for I am anxious to obtain time to sit down and write you a long letter accordant with my own feelings without interruption and embarrassment.

But this week I have been much engaged and yesterday was what is called in common parlance "general training" here and I served all day as a soldier—was much fatigued and am in the "dumps" (pure yankeeyism [sic]) today in consequence.

This day very busy in preparing papers to send to Albany and New York by the bearer of this. So you see my dear, dear girl you must excuse me for haste, inelegance, or even nonsense, as you perceive I had rather write you under all these disadvantages than not to write you at all.

Separated, as unfortunately for my feelings and happiness we now are, I am exceedingly solicitous to maintain the only intercourse in our power, and it is a high gratification to me to commune with you in this way—to write to you—a great pleasure to reflect that you will soon be reading what I am now writing—that your eyes which have often been turned upon me with fascinating tenderness will ere long be wandering over this very line and those identical letters on which I am now looking and which my pen is now forming.

Well I am wretchedly provoked—here are almost a dozen people in the office—I have been called away three times whilst writing the four last sentences. How can one write or think or feel in such a tumult?

But write I will. There now a moment's peace I hope. I've just told a man I am very busy indeed and cannot attend to him—hold your tongues there every rascal of you in the office—say not a word to me—I am in better business now than listening to your trash—I am holding counsel (in imagination) with one whom I would rather see one moment than every one of you with your pockets filled with gold to give me for a fee.

Oh, Henrietta, tell Lucy that Purdy was here yesterday training—tell her moreover he has become a Sergeant already—yes sergeant of a military company in Champlain—tell her moreover the company is a set of ill looking chaps—that there are scarcely 3 decent men in the company besides himself—that all the other officers are such dunces that he has to take the command.

Ask her if she does not feel herself of more consequence already because Mills is Sergeant. Look at her now and see if she does not hold her head higher and pucker up her lips some. Tell her to throw off her old apron—put by her spinning wheel and slick up a little seeing she has become a sergeant's deary. What a sad thing it would be now tho if he should feel himself of so much importance to say nothing more to her. Promotion has a dangerous effect upon young men—apt to make 'em giddy a little—what danger then may not be apprehended when an ambitious is raised to the high rank of Sergeant of such a company.

Give my love to Lucy and to the family—tell the huzzy to write to me—it would gratify me much. I suppose however she will not for I suspect I do not hold a very favorable station in her heart.

Lucy did not marry Sergeant Purdy, but rather Peter I.H. Myers

William to Henrietta

Plattsburgh October 8, 1811

My only dear girl,

The mail arrived a few moments since and brought me a letter from Lucy, but gracious heaven, what was my astonishment and pungency of feeling on perusing it. When it was handed me in the post office I observed the post mark "from Fairvale" and thought it must be from my Fair Girl of course, as I had long been expecting one from her. I put the letter in my pocket, took some other papers and stepped hastily to my office. Immediately with an anxious anxiety broke open the letter without examining particularly the hand writing of the superscription, not doubting but the letter was from your own dear self. Judge you who know how ardently I love you of my surprise when I read the first words which were "In consequence of my sister's illness" and casting my eyes to the bottom saw the signature "Lucy F. Kirtland". Indeed my dear girl, I know not whether my feelings ever experienced a more unexpected or violent shock—expecting a letter from your own hand I found instead that you were unable to write—wishing as ardently as I wish for heaven's happiness to hear that you enjoyed good health I was told that you were experiencing and suffering the commencement of a dangerous disease, what a contrast, what a disappointment indeed. Reading the letter further I found that the typhus fever had entered your family, and that the disorder had made an attack upon you. Yes it must be so, I have no hope remaining that it has not although Lucy was not positive, yet she said you were seized with a violent head ache and sickness, all the dreadful forerunners of the dreadful malady.

He continues, invoking heavens blessings upon her, and laments he does not know whether to write for fear her illness render her incapable of reading his letter and it might fall into other hands. He also concludes that it had been almost two weeks since she became ill and he heard of it, so by this time her fate would be determined. He pleads for her or someone in the family to write him soon with more information.

Plattsburgh October 13, 1811

My dearly beloved girl

I intended to have attended church this forenoon, but being rather dilatory in preparing I perceived that it was time for the first service to be almost concluded before I was ready. "I will not attend church this forenoon" said I to myself, "I am ashamed to go in so late when I reside so near." I had just opened the door to go out as I said this. I immediately closed it again and returned into the office. "Well what will you do till afternoon service commences?" was the next mental question. "Why" said inclination, (my feelings in an instant springing into pleasurable life as she said it) "you shall employ the time in writing to the dearest being you have on earth." The subject was no sooner proposed than determined upon. So here I am, seated in my office entirely alone, executing the said resolution, and in so doing am engaged in the most pleasing

employment possible whilst separated from you, except it be that of perusing a letter written by your own dear hand (and the latter by the by is an employment you take good care I shall not be engaged in very frequently, and lately not at all).

He continued a lengthy letter, mentioning he had received one from Lucy, and would omit the remainder until after the mail arrived the following Tuesday.

Well my dear, Tuesday has arrived—and so has the mail. It came about 12 o'clock—several hours later than usual. I became impatient and fretted all the day—went frequently to the door and looked down the street in which it passes to see if I could discover it—at length it came—filled with hope and anxiety I went immediately to the post office—the boy was opening the mail and undoing the packages. A counter separated me from him. “If you find any letters directed to me”, said I,” throw them to me without waiting till you open the whole mail.” “ I will”, he replied. Several were thrown me as he proceeded gradually—but they were directed to “Sperry and Swetland.” Alas, thought I, these are not the ones I wish. I waited half an hour or more with great impatience (for the mail was large) attentively watching the boy as he opened the packets. At length he finished unclosing them. “Are there no more letters for me?” asked I. “No Sir” “Have you opened all the packages?” “Yes” I exclaimed—“is it possible—I can’t believe it—I will examine myself”—I immediately sprang over the counter and began looking over the letters. “It is against the law, Mr. Swetland”, said the boy,” for others to be handling the papers while the mail is opening.” “ I cannot help that”, I replied, ”against law or not, I will satisfy myself, for I believe you have overlooked one.” I continued my search in vain. I found no letter on which I could trace the well known and welcome writing of my dearly beloved girl, after searching thoroughly. I in truth sorrowfully left the office, sadly disappointed and with keen sensations. I mention these things, my dear girl, as absolute facts, that you may perceive of how much importance it is to my feelings to receive a letter from you.

He concluded a lengthy letter, then added another half sheet with several questions, in part seeking to ascertain her feelings toward him and was there possibly someone else in her life as implied in the letter from Lucy.

October 19, 1811

P.S. to the letter of the 13th

Mr. Sperry starts in a few moments on his journey and I have only time to add a word or two. I presume he will see you on Monday—oh that it were myself instead of him. How would my heart leap with joy if I believed I should see you myself in so short a time.

I do not know but the manner in which I have written some sentences in the letter in which this is enclosed may appear unkind. But perish the sentence which gave the least pain to the feelings of my dear girl. I know I wrote the latter part of said letter under the influence of very severe feelings—alarmed as I was with respect to your health by Lucy’s letter, and you could not but know it would give me much uneasiness. I did expect your goodness and regard to my happiness would have given me information by the next mail of the true state of affairs—but you may have reasons which are satisfactory—I ought to presume so—and if anything I have written appears unkind I pray you pardon it. But you

will write me immediately and frequently will you not my dear girl—can you refuse so trifling a trouble to yourself when you know how anxious I am to receive your letters.

Lucy wrote to her sister Henrietta

Granville, October 1811

My Dear Sister

This morning I expect to set out for Troy but think I cannot possibly dismiss oh so favorable an opportunity of writing. I would ask you why you neglect us so-it is almost or quite six weeks since we have received a letter from you. The count is quite alarmed that he does not receive one. He accuses me of being the cause, but Heaven knows I am innocent to be sure. I did hint something to you about him and Miss Backus but I did not intend anything serious, it was only done to retaliate for something he wrote to you about me. I beg you to write immediately and remove his suspicions for it gives me very unpleasant feelings to have him entertain such an opinion of me. No Henrietta, he never will love another, he lives but for you and I sincerely hope you do for him—he is worthy of you and I should be proud to call him brother.

William to Henrietta

Plattsburgh, October 28, 1811

Monday night. I have had an excessively fatiguing day and have been standing on my feet examining witnesses and speaking from 9 o'clock this morning till a few minutes since-am so hoarse I can hardly speak-was scarcely ever more exhausted-was up last night preparing for this day's services till past one o'clock -tis now nearly eleven at night. But not withstanding this excessive weariness and oppressive fatigue I cannot induce myself to retire without first writing a few lines addressed or intended for you whether they ever meet your eyes or not-for never has my mind been so much agitated, - my feelings so agonized-never have I suffered so much on your account, as at this moment.

It is now two months nearly since I left you-since with a lacerated heart I parted from her my soul adores and still adores-and not a syllable have you written me. Am I justified in being uneasy or not? Are my apprehensions groundless?

His lengthy letter continues to describe his feelings, and anxiety at waiting for the weekly mail delivery. He then commences with a dialogue he has had with himself of late between his feelings of jealousy and the reasons for same, justified or not.

William and Henrietta's long distance courtship did end well, with their marriage in Granville. After a few weeks of wedded bliss, William returned to Plattsburgh via Connecticut to visit family members, leaving Henrietta in Granville.

His first letter was written from Beeman's Tavern in Poultney.

Poultney December 6, 1811

My dearest and only beloved girl, nay more, my own dear wife and lovely partner of my bosom,

Mr. White (Wilson) who brought us here intends returning this evening to Granville. So he told me just now. "I will write my love, said I to myself." "Landlord give me pen, ink and paper if you please." So here I am writing to one who holds the nearest and dearest place in my heart—one who is the sole sovereign of my affections. My heart is a "little kingdom" to be sure, but such as it is, my dearest, you reign absolute monarch and hold undisputed dominion over it.

He continues with more description of his travel.

William writes to Henrietta after his arrival back in Plattsburgh.

Plattsburgh December 17, 1811

Plattsburgh—yes Plattsburgh—thank heaven, I have it in my power to write from Plattsburgh. Columbus and his men did not experience greater satisfaction when they first discovered land in America and first set their feet on the long wished for shore, than did I when I landed at Plattsburgh—"after numerous perils by sea and land." The fact is we had a very unpleasant, tedious, and in several instances, hazardous passage from Burlington to this place. But suffice it to say, I am now safely here, a narrative or journal of our passage I presume would not interest you—and besides I have not now time to give it. But, stop a moment let me begin my letter in the middle, or rather let me address it in a manner confoundably [sic] to the dictates and wishes of my heart; in a manner that thrills my heart with pleasure—

My dearest and dearly beloved wife,

Yes let me write those epithets and that title, for here in "my lonely solitude" to write them and read them afford to my feelings as great a luxury as they enjoy—and that it is in my power to write them may heaven accept my gratitude"

William was involved with community affairs and in a partial letter (the remainder is missing) describes a social affair he attended sometime after returning to Plattsburgh.

Well then the ball was splendid, Plattsburgh shone, the room was highly decorated, or rather ornamented, music very good, the girls and ladies all in their best spirits and best fix, and just about a sufficient number to make it convenient and agreeable—how indeed I wished you with me. I could not reconcile my feelings to your absence, and the frequent "wishing me joy" from the ladies I had not seen before since my return, and the numerous inquiries about you were the same to my feelings as telling me every moment—"well Swetland your own girl is not here." The ladies were very polite and very particular in inquiring when I should bring my lady to grace the circle of Plattsburgh—and assuring me they should consider it a very great addition to their society.

I expected a letter from you by yesterday's mail but did not receive it.

Write me how the Dukes and everybody else treat you—write particularly every thing—write every day as I asked you.

The inflammation in my eye and the boils on my face are nearly well and my health is good.

Give my love to Lucy, your mother, grand mother and the family.

I am very impatient to hear from you.

It was several years before Henrietta moved to Plattsburgh, during which time she had extended periods of illness. William was obliged to remain in Plattsburgh during the time court was in session and she continued to reside in her parent's home.

From Lucy to William

Granville December 2, 1814

My Dear Brother

This is to inform you that Henrietta is no better, it is her request that you should come as soon as possible. She is much lower than when I wrote you last, her disorder has returned. She has something of the typhus. Yesterday afternoon she was taken worse, we sent for Dr. Hall—he told us not to be alarmed about her, she would get along. She has had a turn of raising blood which alarmed us. I think she is not in immediate danger, but do not delay coming as soon as you can get here.

From John Kirtland, Henrietta's father, to William

Poultney March 22, 1815

My Dear Sir,

I came here and have waited with a wagon expecting you in the Northern Stage, and it is with the greatest pain I have to inform you that your dear wife is failing fast, and I fear if you do not come immediately you will never see her alive—and I fear very much the consequence of my return and your not being with me for she has told me this day that she very much feared she should not live to see you. I wrote you last Friday and Mr. Myers also wrote, and he wrote you on Monday. I fear you are sick or you would have been here (here). We have sent for Dr. Allen of Salem, we expect him tomorrow and was in hopes that you would have been here. I trust you will lose no time in coming. I must close as it is late and I am keeping up the Post Master. I am yours affectionately.

Henrietta does come to Plattsburgh in the summer of 1817 prior to the birth of their daughter Lucy Ann in September. They lived in a house on Oak Street near the corner with Broad Street.

From William to Henrietta while on a business trip

Cincinnati, Ohio September 5, 1818

Dearest Wife,

Here I am at last, safely in Cincinnati which is one of the principal towns in the state of Ohio. We arrived here this afternoon at 4 o'clock. I am in very good health, all things considered. I wrote you last from Portsmouth at the mouth of the Big Scioto, on the 4th instance I believe. We shall remain here until tomorrow afternoon. I am now in a room where there is another gentleman who has just gone to bed and who by his

tumbling appears to fretting inwardly at this disturbance I give him by sitting up. Indeed I only began this letter for the purpose of letting you know that I am safely here and of bidding you good night and requesting you to kiss that dear little girl, the two dearest beings on earth. May heaven preserve you and render you happy. May your rest and mine be sweet this night.

He continues the letter the next day and describes his travels further and the things he has done and seen in the area including several hills that appear to be ancient mounds located a short distance from the town. He concludes with an “adieu my dear girl, love to all, and kiss that dear little girl for me and tell her to say Pa.”

William had a deep and abiding connection to family. He traveled to the place of his youth later in life and subsequently wrote to a relative named Richard Chipman.

Plattsburgh October 12, 1848

Dear Sir,

In a letter recently received from the Hon. Daniel Chipman of Ripton, Vermont he mentions that you have been for several years collecting materials for a genealogy of the Chipman family which will probably be published the present year.

I am descended from that family as my mother (Mary) was a daughter of John Chipman, mentioned on page 6 of Daniel Chipman's life sketch of N. Chipman as the second son of Thomas Chipman who was born at Barnstable 1684 and moved to Salisbury, Conn. 1740. My mother married Aaron Swetland, my father. I was born in Salisbury, Conn. in 1782 and resided there till I was about 18.

Having a strong desire to revisit my native town in my old age, I last summer carried the wish into execution. My purpose in writing is to state the information I obtained there—it being the ancient residence of my branch of the family and thinking it possible some of the facts may be useful to you in reference to the object you have in mind, if not already known to you, and if so, you will please excuse the trouble I give you. I had a recollection of the ancient burying grounds, situated at what is now called Lime Rock. On visiting it last summer, I found that it had long been discontinued as a place of interment, though recently enclosed with a fence by order of the town. It had for years remained to commons. But few monuments remained standing unbroken. I found several standing in a cluster in one part of the ground. They were made of the common black slate, rudely carved and covered with moss, and the inscriptions considerably defaced by the hand of time. On removing the moss with considerable difficulty, I was able to read the following among others, and as you may well suppose with deep interest.

He describes the stone markers he was able to find and identify, and states his intention to place an additional monument on his mother's grave beside the original one.

William's law practice covered almost half a century and probably included both criminal and civil affairs. He had dealings with many of the notable residents of Plattsburgh and the surrounding area, some of whom became close friends, business partners, and even family members through marriages. Of particular note in the latter case are Nathan Averill, Jr. and Reuben Walworth.

One of the business ventures involved the Northern Rail Road Company. There had been efforts made to encourage extending the rail line north and possibly across Lake Champlain at Plattsburgh, but it was unsuccessful at this time.

James Beekman was one of those associated with the venture. He and William corresponded frequently.

Albany March 7, 1949

Dear Sir,

I yesterday received from the sheriff of the city and county of New York a notice that he had been holding an execution against me for \$559.79 as the suit of the Northern R.R. Company. Mr. John Landus went up to Canton about two weeks ago and reported to me that he had conversed with Judge Hand, who would have tried our cause had it come to trial, that Judge Hand and several other legal friends of his had advised him not to open the default which the R.R. Company had entered against us, but to advise his clients quietly to pay. I have accordingly this day remitted to the sheriff of New York the amount of execution and costs and find myself, much to my chagrin, outgeneraled by the R.R. Company and often having been singled out for a swindle faced to submit, by a day's delay of the mail which bore our answer in the suit against us. However there is a chance for being righted. This outrageous company is now before the Legislature with a request to be permitted to bridge Lake Champlain at Rouses Point, and as I am now a stockholder, and fight against my own interest in opposing the Company. I mean to oppose the company in my place here as far as possible. I shall tell my own story when it may do Plattsburgh some good.

He concludes with other personal matters, and requests William to, "let me know the state of feeling at Plattsburgh about the bridge, and how my own private matters are getting on."

William's reply to James Beekman

Plattsburgh March 12, 1849

Dear Sir,

I with pleasure acknowledge the receipt of your obliging favor of the 7th instance. I feel deep regret at the result of your Rail Road suit, and the more so from an apprehension that I had unfortunately, though with the best intentions and good faith and friendship, some agency in leading you into that difficulty. I hope it is the only instance in which any advice of mine may prove to your disadvantage, and the best apology I can offer is, that I was myself deceived. Still, I am of opinion that if that road be properly went upon, it will pay well and be good stock. How far, in present hands, this result may be realized is another question. I have lost all confidence for there has never come to my knowledge an instance of a greater departure from fair and honorable dealings among men usually called honorable than is presented in the course taken in relation to the citizens of Plattsburgh by that company. Unfortunately, I am the greatest sufferer by the diversion of the road to Rouses Point. It takes from my dock property an annual income more than equal to the interest on \$30,000.

I am totally at a loss to conjecture the reasons for the advice given by Judge Hand and others to Mr. Sanders, and I have written to him asking for information.

You asked to know the state of feeling at Plattsburgh in relation to the bridge. There is but one feeling on the subject here—that of warm and decided opposition, and we can hardly conceive it feasible that a New York Legislature can be cajoled into a measure which will be suicidal to New York state interests. Nothing but the strong combination of moneyed and other interests, formed for the purpose of carrying that measure, can render it successful. From what I can learn there seems to be a strong host of lobby members kept employed, and of course paid. The pretense that the interests of the city of New York will be promoted by that measure seems to us a perfect humbug. There is one answer to this that is conclusive, that a road on the west side of the lake to unite with the Whitehall Road will promote all New York state interests to a much greater degree than the bridges, and the road through Vermont can possibly do.

Some of the citizens are getting up a small map, which will make this appear very conclusively, and when I can procure one I will forward it, and express further the facts and my views on the subject.

And, no person who looks at the progress and course of events can doubt one moment, but what a road on the west side of the lake will be made, and that before long, especially if the bridge be refused.

That bridge, if made, may prevent, or greatly delay, the construction of such a road, and that in my mind is a conclusive reason why a N.Y. Legislature should not grant the bridge.

But, I must omit further remarks on this subject until another occasion. I write from a sick room. I have been confined to my house for some time, but hope soon to be out again.

I have been perfectly aware that your time must be laboriously occupied in Albany, and this consideration has deterred me from troubling you with communications from myself.

I by leave to express a hope in accordance with your opinion of the public interests to give the Clinton Prison another trial. I do not think it has had a fair one yet. It would seem that poor Clinton County is to be struck down from all quarters.

William concludes with other minor matters and an expression of his high esteem for his friend. A railroad trestle bridge was placed at Rouses Point.

From James Beekman to William upon returning from a trip to Europe

New York December 6, 1856

My dear Wm Sweetland,

I am this moment honored by the reception of your very kind and welcome letter of 3rd instance. To be so warmly received by a friend who has known me so long is indeed gratifying, and that you may long be spared to the prayers of your friend is my earnest desire.

My wife's health seems completely restored. Her illness, which began in an attack of cholera, Nov 6, 1853, resulted in April 1854 in an abscess of the liver, which discharged into the stomach or lungs. A winter in Florida and Savannah, Georgia

whither I carried her in December 1853 had perhaps averted the malady from a more vital organ, the lungs. The voyage to Europe, and the entire change of living, water, and mental amusement in travel at last overcame the difficulty, and at Berlin in June 1855, she had her last slight illness. Since that time she has been as well as for 10 years past, and I have brought home my little family unbroken in number. My four children have all learned to speak French, but in Europe foreigners learn little else, for our children spend a year in acquiring the use of the tools of learning.

I do not admire the schools abroad, even those of Geneva, for Sunday is a Holiday all over the continent. There is no Sabbath, and if you were to ask me the reason why the Reformation has made so little progress since Luther, I shall not hesitate to say because the continental Protestants never kept holy the Lord's Day.

Compare the condition of Scotland and England in freedom, arts, and wealth, with all the world beside, not even excepting America and you will agree with me that the doctrines of John Knox were wiser than those of Calvin—as children learn by what they see rather than by what they hear. I would not leave one of mine without a parent's care too long.

On returning home I find myself vexed by the constant attention of my ancient foes the Corporation, to my interests a large debt in the shape of what they call assessments having been run up against me, and my taxes having doubled. But cares are marks of Divine regard.

I snatch up my pen to show by my prompt reply to your letter how highly I appreciate it. Your partner's dispatch has been read and their request touching the deed shall be attended to.

My wife, were she here (I write at a law office down town) would send you her affectionate regards as I do in her name, and I entreat you to receive the best wishes and esteem of your obliged friend and servant.

James Beekman also had a great regard for civil and community matters as evidenced in this letter to William.

New York, February 17, 1787

My dear Wm. Swetland

This morning, while examining the Report of the Select Committee appointed to visit Charitable Institutions supported by the state, I find at page 37, the most painful account of our Clinton County Poor House. Can it be that the "district school refuses to receive the children and that they are at large"—that is, they are growing up in vice to become murderers and criminals of every shade!

I pray you to stir up the good people who look up to you with so much respect in Plattsburgh. Do see that these poor children are taught, and that some religious teaching, and a few bibles are put among the paupers.

Fearing that you may not have received a copy of the Report, I now send you one, and beg you call attention to the fact, which my own observation confirms, that to educate one orphan or child costs the public one tenth only as much as it does to maintain one convict in jail (see page 11).

In his reply, William promises to bring the subject of the report on the Poor House to the attention of public officials.

William's and Henrietta had two daughters, Lucy Ann and Henrietta or Hetty as she was called. Lucy Ann married and raised a family, while Henrietta apparently chose the single life. In 1859, she began a journey that lasted almost a year. She stayed in New York City with family preparing for a sailing voyage to Havana, Cuba. She embarked on the steamer *Quaker City* and was involved in a shipwreck at sea, from which she was rescued. With trepidation, she eventually did take another ship to Cuba and stayed there several months before finally returning to Plattsburgh. By this time, William had suffered a stroke, failing eyesight, and as he wrote in February 1859, "my health is feeble as usual, mother (Betsy Delord Swetland) is as usual and sends her love."

Norfolk, Virginia October 9, 1859

My dear Father,

I am too wearied and exhausted to write every thing but a few disconnected lines—and I must confess in dejection. My life is spared and I believe that is all. All that we know is that on Thursday morning last at 10:00 o'clock we and about 90 of the passengers of the "Quaker City" were lowered from her sides into the life boats, and taken from there into a bark that (answering our signals of distress) lay to and received us onto her decks. In that bark we have lived (or rather ordered for the cabin was not possible to exist in) from that time until this morning at 4:00 o'clock we anchored off in Hampton Roads and were taken off by a steamer bound for Norfolk, and here we are. The last that I saw of our noble steamer it was floating in the gulf stream 40 miles below Cape Hatteras with her reversed flags flying from bow and stern like a bereaved person holding up pitiless hands for help. God grant she may have been saved by some passing vessel. Our fear is, nay almost a certainty that the beautiful vessel has sunk in the sea with her noble captain and crew who refused to leave her, and some of the passengers who unwisely risked their lives to remain with their luggage.

I cannot write connectedly—so much and that so terrific has transpired that my thoughts are strangely scattered—but our lives are barely saved—we are waiting with anxious hearts for tidings of the vessel—but unless some wanderer on the ocean highway picked her up, we fear she is totally lost with all on board, and all that belongs to us, but—oh I cannot write, I will at some time write a connected account of all—at present I can only say that on Wednesday night while sleeping sweetly in our berths, congratulating ourselves that the stormy Hatteras was passed and the next morning would bring us to the balm of the tropics, we all knew by a crack that shook the vessel to its center—the engine was an entire wreck in one instant not a fragment enough left to tell where the floor was. A sad man was Captain Schafeldt the next morning, a sadder one I never saw, he probably pre-saw death—we in our ignorance did not—but in obedience to quite orders, we quietly dressed at one o'clock at night, we would be driven to the life boats at night but we were not until the next morning. I will write it at some time. I cannot now—if there floats the poor steamer yet she cannot live tonight with this dreadful storm. Of course dearest father, the loss I have sustained is nothing to that of life, but I confess, I felt it deeply—not so much for the money value of purchased things, but for beautiful presents and many things money can never replace. I cannot realize—it seems like some horrible dream—the steamer that brought us up this morning refused all compensation from our party of 90 and gave us breakfast on our arrival and was sent to

us by the proprietor of the Atlantic that free rooms were at our disposal, and here we are till tomorrow. Soon I shall see you.

In a postscript, she reports that even the carpetbag she had taken on the bark was misplaced and she had been given a few things by other survivors. She later reports that the *Quaker City* was saved, that eventually her luggage was returned, and she was compensated for her passage and carpetbag. She even said the replaced items were better than the old lost ones, except for a favorite cameo that had been a gift, and she had benefited from tragedy.

The steamship *Quaker City* was built in 1854 and after the above incident returned to service as a commercial carrier. She was converted to a warship and commissioned in 1861 to serve during the Civil War. She was subsequently decommissioned, resumed her commercial career, and was the scene of some of Mark Twain's tales in his book "The Innocents Abroad". Ultimately the steamer was sold to the Haitian Navy, renamed twice, and sadly lost at sea off Bermuda in 1871.

William Swetland passed away peacefully on January 1, 1864. There were many tributes in the collection written by his associates extolling his contributions during the many years he practiced his profession and served in the community of Plattsburgh, New York

The first letter in this collection was dated 1805 concerning some family property in Connecticut. The last was a thank you note to the third generation Henrietta from a nephew dated 1905.

These few samples are a small representation of the overall collection of 268 items, produced in a time when paper, pen, and ink were used to create cherished items to be retained and treasured. We hope you enjoyed becoming acquainted with one of Plattsburgh's early leading citizens along with some of his family and friends.