

The following letter was written from Johan Reiersen in Kaufman County Texas to his son, Oscar Reiersen, who was in Virginia at the onset of the WBTS & could not get back to Texas to enlist with his brothers here. Johna emigrated here in 1845 from Norway - he founded the town of Brownsboro in Henderson Co TX & the town of Prairieville in Kaufman Co TX. The letter shows a good example of what prices for commodities were during the war and what persons did in their daily routines.

Prairieville, December 22nd, 1862

My dear Son,

I wrote you a short letter from Brownsboro shortly after the receipt of yours of 9th of October, and Ouline has since last time had another epistle of yours dated the 18th, which she has not answered yet, mostly on account of her right second finger has got stiff and benumbed after the long swelling in it, so she must now use her long finger for writing. Previous to receiving your last letter to me, I had written a letter to your Mary inclosed in a ditto to B. C. Flannagan, Esq., but has yet not got any acknowledgement of the receipt of those. I also inclosed to Mr. F. \$5 to subscribe on Richmond Examiner and Inquirer but have not yet seen any of those papers, so perhaps my letter may be lost.

As to my little family here, we are all in good health, and tolerably good spirits, and always busy with the many small household duties, that scarcely can be described; but at a time when there is no help to be had for anything, there is plenty to do for those that stay at home. Just now today I have been employed from early in the morning to drive up a beefsteer, kill and butcher it, cut up and salt down the meat, besides the usual attention of 5 milk cows and feeding the horses as also the hogs put up for pork, and you better believe Ouline has had her hands full, as also Charley, who is my main dependant now. I told you in my last letter that we had moved into my dwelling in the Grove, and both I and Ouline feel so comfortable up here, that we have made up our mind to stay here, and not move any more, taking care of cattle, sheep and horses.

Christmas is approaching, and I have succeeded in laying in a plentiful supply for the winter of flour, cornmeal, corn, sweet potatoes and salt, and when I shall have killed 8 hogs that I am fattening, the want shall not knock at our doors for the meat season, unless the Yankees should come in and plunder us. I feel the more satisfied, since I just have had letters from Christian and John, who both were well and in good spirits when they wrote, only that I could make them partake in our Christmas cheer and good things, when they poor fellows are living very hard, especially John in Arkansas, where they don't get

anything but cornmeal and blue beef, and not always enough of that.

We just hear about a battle they have had not far from Ft. Smith, where our troops after a three day's fight at last succeeded in whipping the Federals, and driving them 15 miles back. I have seen no official account of the battle, only hearsay from some letters arrived here from men in Bass' Regiment, which did not participate in the battle; tho' called out and had actually crossed the Arkansas River. They state that they now think that they will go into winter quarters, and I just learn that Capt. Johnson has written, that he expects to get home to Christmas. I expect Julie is in high glee this night - I shall see her tomorrow morning, as she is our next neighbour. Christian got unharmed out of both the last two bloody battles in Iuka and Corinth - and he writes me he is getting along finely since he has got his horse back and the winter clothing we sent him.

As for you, I hope you spend your Christmas happily with your sweet little dove in the the bosom of a cheerful family circle, - I hope it, tho' it may not be so, and perhaps you are off in the mountains and hills, chasing or chased, and perhaps too that you have been in a bloody battle that we long time have expected at or near Fredericksburg. Somehow I feel like you were safe, - and God grant that it may prove true. I would be delighted to hear that you were out of the turmoils of the war, and engaged in some safer business, and that at least one of my grown boys might be saved for me and for a useful and honorable after life, when the war should be ended, if ever it is to end. The expectation of the gigantic struggle that is near at hand on all sides, and the calling out of still more men, has at the last time created a gloom and despondency, that I sometime sicken to see, as I yet hope that we will be able to withstand the shock and drive the enemy back, and that when that gigantic effort has proven ineffective, the undercurrent of the feeling and writing for peace that necessarily must exist so well in the North as in the South, will swell up to the surface and arrest the current to a peaceful termination; and I don't think that I will be deceived in the expectation of the intervention of European powers. - I think it will come one fine morning, suddenly and when we least are looking for it.

The situation here is getting tolerably hard, and prices have risen to an unknown height. Owing to a severe draught the wheat crop was a failure in the prairie country - and corn crop still worse; but on account of having a large supply of wheat from last year, it opened with sale of wheat at one dollar a bushel and from 4 to 5 \$ pr cwl of flour, but having entirely failed in the eastern part of the state and in the western from the Brazos, waggons came in in such a number that prices rose directly up to 7 to 10 and from 10 to 12 and at last 15\$ pr cw of flour, and cannot now be had for money. Corn right here on Cedar Creek could at first be bought for 60 cents to 1 \$ a bushel. but wagons streaming in

from the North and West raised it suddenly to \$1.25, a price which we thought extraordinary, on account of the vast quantity raised in all the eastern and southern portion of the state.

But as the most got slightened and it was found necessary to fatten the hogs on corn only, it soon took a rise even there from 50 up to 75 and \$1.00, at what price it was stationary some time, till a fearful inundation of negro droves from Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi, - sometimes thousands in a drove with mules and horses, brought it up to 1.50 and \$ 2.00 a bushel and hard to get at that, not on account of scarcity, but from a notion they took to quit selling entirely, undoubtedly with the speculation to raise it up to a still higher figure, and I should not wonder if it came up to 4 or 5 \$ a bushel. As a natural consequence pork is contracted at 15, 20 and even 25 @ lb. Here was an abundance of hogs, but as they would not stand the winter without feeding, they were bought up and driven off to Red River, where corn seems to be inexhaustible. Thousands have in this way been sold in this neighbourhood, and money distributed all around.

Droves of beeves are also taken off by thousands, but still the prices have not risen proportionally, and 16 and 20 \$ for 3 and 4 years old have been ruling. I sold 30 head 4 years old, including some few Georgianas Salt has been and still is rising higher and higher, till they now ask 25 \$ a sack, - altho' new furnaces are rising every day and new wells dug - the whole saline prairie both at Sabine and Nueces looks like an enormous large city, composed of small loghouses, furnaces and wells, in one confused mass. Every boiler from from old sawmills round about are converted into evaporating kettles, and the Jordans Saline [?] has now a population of 4 to 5000 men - very few women. That is a common fair, where every thing of eatables and clothing is exchanged for salt - sweet potatoes @ 2 @ 3 \$ bushel, butter @ 40 cents to 1 \$ @ lb., corn 3 \$, flour 20 cents @ lb{etc}... An old coat or a pair of old breeches easily commands a sack of salt, as also shoes or boots. Leather is almost impossible to be had owing to that every tanyard has had government contracts to deliver a certain quantity of shoes, and they work up every hide before it is more than half tanned; but a large portion of the farmers are now making their own leather, and next year I think it will be plentiful and come down to reasonable prices. The standard price for a pair of leather shoes is now 5 \$, but hard to be had at that.

A good many believe or try to bring about the opinion, that these high prices are chiefly owing to a depreciation of the Confederate money; but as certainly as it is, that I at this time with gold or silver might buy the most of above named articles at half the price, just so certainly is it, that if gold and silver was the circulating medium and so plentiful as the paper money now, the same articles would command the same prices, as the laws of

demand would rule here, as sometimes back in California. In fact, I don't see any depreciation of our money yet here in Texas: the standard of value has always here been cows & calves, and they still hold their old prices and even are coming down to \$ 10, like they were when we first emigrated hither. Lumber, that always commanded ready cash like sugar & coffee, is stationary at the old prices, and little sale at that. Our sawmill has been idle all this year: I have had frequent propositions for selling it partly for the boiler to make salt, but always declined. Now I am on the point of starting an iron foundry. The idea has originated thus: At Mound Prairie, where there is established a large gun factory, and where my partner John Hanson is employed, they made an experiment for about 2 months ago to melt down some iron ore, - and by just burning the rocks on some wooden logs they decomposed them to a sort of sand, which they then gathered up and threw in a common blacksmith furnace, and smelted it down; and without any further process, they hammered out the smelted iron and found it to be of an excellent quality, equal and even superior to Norwegian iron, in toughness and durability.

A man by name of Hassel immediately made preparations to put up a small foundry, and tried to buy our engine; but Mr. Hanson that knows more of the foundry business than any man in this country, having been employed from boy up in the large Ness Ironworks [Nes Jernverk, Norway], but never had imagined that the ore could be smelted by so easy a process, and aware too that we have inexhaustible iron beds in the Brownsboro mountains, of the same quality as in Mound Prairie, thought we had better try it on our own hook, and move our machinery to the old spring and put a foundry in operation on a small scale. He says that the whole outlay will not cost us more than 1000 dollars: we require only two large hammers, that we can procure from a foundry in Cass County, and 10 hands will be sufficient, which hands I think are exempt from the conscript service, and will therefore easily be had on moderate terms. I am going down to Mound Prairie soon after Christmas, and we will then finally make a [decision]. Iron is not to be had either in Houston, Shreveport or Jefferson, and it will readily command 50 cents @ lb. during the war. The Government gunshops will have to stop here if iron cannot be produced in the country.

Now I have scribbled full my paper, and altho' I might fill sheets with speculations on politics, I think you by the above has got a little view of our situation. Therefore expecting a letter from you, and wishing you all prosperity and happiness,

I remain your fond loving father,
John R. Reiersen

This letter mentions politicians of the era, some important men in Texas, at that time.
Prairieville,

September 20th, 1863

My dear Son,

It is a long, long time since I had any letter from you, and the last I had was a long letter from your Mary, dated the 17th of May. I ought properly to have written to her this time to thank her for her kind affectionate and interesting epistle, but I guess that she will read your letter if ever it gets to hand, so that its content will be known to both of you. The fall of Vicksburg has entirely broken of all regular mail communication, and at present I send this with a soldier from Christian's company, who has been home on furlough, and is returning trying to cross the Mississippi to get back to his command. It is Ob. Erwin that was lucky enough to draw one of the two tickets of furlough for each company. He is in fine health and spirits, and says that almost all the boys are in the same way. I had of course a letter from Christian, who is well and sanguine of final success; and as communication is open I expect that you and him correspond quite frequently, tho' he doesn't mention you in his letter.

As for us, we have all been well this summer, Ouline unusually so, and have all been busy, Charley and I taking care of the stock, and Ouline with her wheel, that has been running from morning to night regularly and without intermission. You might every morning and evening have seen me and Charley riding about the prairie, driving or hunting cows with young calves, or hunting or driving up horses and mares with young colts, and then both of us assisting in the cowpen to milk and lye up calves. We have had up some 70 or 80 young calves, and have milked all the cows, and Ouline has put up some 300 lbs. of butter, so you may conclude that we have not been idle. I tried besides to farm and had put 10 acres of corn in Brad Spike's old field; and Charley and me were frequently down there working with the hoes and sweating profusely for a good crop of corn, the hogs worked themselves in, and in spite all we could do to repair and fix the fence, they would break the old rails with main - rather snout - force, and I had to give up the whole crop to them, only saving some fodder, so I now have to buy my corn for the winter.

I expect you to have learned that we had the finest sort of a crop, both of wheat, but especially of corn, and the general expectancy was, that these main articles would have been cheap; but by the fall of Vicksburg a universal depression of spirit spread over the

country, and a universal depreciation of our currency was the result, so that wheat went up from 2 to 6\$ @ bushel, and corn from 1 to 3\$, and hard to be bought at that, and all other articles in proportion, with exception of salt that is lower now than it has been in the last year; selling from \$10 to \$12 @ sack.

A good many flatly refuse to sell for Confederate money, and if things do not take a turn in our favor, I hardly know what will be the result. A good deal of common trade is now carried on in the old predesline [sic] way of exchange of commodities, and one article of necessity will but buy others that you need; so I expect I shall have to exchange cattle for my supply of corn. I have bought my wheat and Charley is now down at the mill with the Negro boy to have it ground. Pork will be high too, altho' here will be an abundance of meat, and the article can not be engaged for less than 25 cents @ lb.

The call for 10,000 Militia and the subsequent call for all men up to 45 years as Conscripts will pretty near clear out the country, and then besides old men are organizing companies of Minute Men to go out in case of emergency - here in Kaufman county we have a company of 60 men, to which I belong, and for a couple of weeks ago Report said that the Federals were driving Cooper's army from Ft. Gibson towards Red River, and that they were only 50 miles from the Texas line, we made all preparation for starting. Since that time it appears that the Federals have retreated, after our forces got some reenforcements, and in spite of all the talk about an invasion from the North, I never could believe that anything like an army would try to penetrate the country, as I could not see any reasonable object to be attained commensurable to to the risk of being cut off from their base of operations and be destroyed piecemeal. I think the report of our last exploit down at Sabine Pass will have reached you, that we took two ironclads, the Clifton of 10 and the Sachem of 5 guns, besides about 300 prisoners and killed and wounded 50 more, without the loss of a man; but it is said, that this was only the feeler for a larger expedition of 10,000 men, that will try to invade us on some point of the coast; in fact all the troops, that before were ordered to Bonham, are now counterordered down toward Galveston, together with the greatest part of the Militia; and although such an invasion would be a calamity, I think it would have a beneficial influence in arousing the common spirit of the people till more healthy energy, and in case of our success in driving them back, effectually stop the mouth of the croakers, that are now so noisy as frogs in a pool after a summer shower.

I am looking for report of the fall of Charleston though I have a faint hope, that the South Carolinians will be spunky enough to fight them even if Charleston should be turned into an asheap; but if that place is given up, I am afraid that Richmond will be untenable, and

that our government will have to emigrate. My views and speculations about the final state of our affairs are getting so confused that I cannot see my way through the labyrinth, unless France and Mexico, united with Spain and eventually England, should step in and form an alliance with us; and from all reasonable deductions I look to such a recognition and alliance as the only means to make an end to the war, and as inevitable in a short time. The reason for such an expectation are obvious enough to need further explanation. But if that won't happen, I am afraid that the spirit of the people will give way; while the only word of recognition would give us a renewed strength, and assist us ever so much by its effect in the North.

Here in Texas we have lately had a political contest by the election of a Governor and Congressman. All the opposition party, Unionists and Disaffected joined to elect [Thomas Jefferson] Chambers, who complained of being ill used and neglected by the President; while the supporters of the Administration voted for [Pendleton] Murrah of Marshal, a man of high abilities, sound judgement and discretion, and he was elected with about 2000 majority, while the opposition Congressmen generally were elected by a small majority. In our district [Malcolm D.] Graham of Rusk, the most talented and faithful of all the Texas delegation got beaten by [Lt. Col. John R.] Baylor of Arizona notoriety - a good Indian fighter certainly and a brave soldier, but a man of reckless character and bad moral standing - a ruffian that boasted in his slump [sic] speeches of his bad deeds - and without any qualifications whatever of statesmanship. He will be a disgrace to Texas.

From John I now hear frequently, as the army of Cooper to which he belongs, are stationed at Boggy Depot, about 45 miles from Bonham. He is well and hearty and in good spirit too. From a report of Col. Bass, acting as General, of the fight at Honey Springs, he names two of the privates who distinguished themselves in the battle, - the flag bearer and John Reiersen, who when the balance retreated or ran, coolly held his ground and continued loading and firing different rounds till he was almost surrounded, then kept retreating firing all the way. I sometimes get quite disheartened when I ponder the slim probability of ever seeing my brave boys at home safe and sound; they have indeed had a wonderful good luck, but the very luck is in the natural course of circumstance a chance for a turn in their disfavor, and I always feel under great anxiety till I recognize their next handwriting. I don't expect to see them before after war is ended, and God only knows how long that will be, and how their fate is when that time ever comes; they may be dead or crippled long before that time.

Still I don't feel like giving up, and you know my temperament is rather sanguine. I cannot think and never will reconcile myself to the idea of subjugation, after all we have fought so valiantly and lost such stream of the best blood in the battles. Should the time ever come, which God forbid, I am determined if I live to leave this disgraced country, and between the Mexican mountains and valleys to seek a hiding place for my old age: I sometime dream of you and your Mary joining the old man emigrating to the land of the Aztecs, and seeking an asylum on the sloping sides of the evergreen valleys, far from the bristle of accursed Yankee race, - and with Ouline and Charley and what remains of my other boys make us a happy home under a genial climate in one of the most favored countries of the globe. I wish you had studied Spanish instead of German for such an event - but I expect it is only a dream - and that we still will conquer an honorable peace with our independence. I must tell you that I have engaged in a speculation of manufacturing cotton carding and spinning machines.

We, John Harrison and me have gone into partnership with a Mr. Sturdevaull, who has previously been engaged in the business in Alabama; we have moved our steam engine to near Palestine, and the house, engine with shafts and pullies are all fixed now to go into operation right of; we have materials on hand to make about 50 machines, and the first 3 or 4 we make will be on a larger scale and put in operation by steam to deliver factory thread, - and besides fix a machinery for making cotton rope by steam. I think it will be a profitable speculation if carried out right and if our money doesn't turn out to be quite worthless; in any such case we can in the meantime exchange machines, factory thread and rope for any commodity we need or see profitable.

Now I must conclude as my paper gives out, give my kindest love to Mary and my grateful acknowledgement of her last welcome letter and the affectionate expressions toward me and Ouline. Charley, if at home, would certainly have written in answer to her long epistle to him - Ouline writes her, but she says that the wheel has carried away all her ideas, so she feels bothered in writing a nice letter. How would Mary like to card and spin and dye months and weeks and days ? Very few, I think, like it - but necessity is a hard taskmaster. I think perhaps if you directed a letter to me through Christian or his Captain Dick Noble, that you know, that they might find a chance to send it over the river, to be mailed in the Trans Mississippi Department. God bless you and yours - Remember me kindly to your parents in law.

Your always affectionate father,
John R. Reiersen