

My grandmother, Kate Allison Wall, was at least 1/4 Scot, as her grandfather, Andrew Allison was born in Scotland and came across to New Orleans in 1839-1840. We have most of a very picturesque letter from Andrew back to his parents in Scotland. It was brought back by Kate's sisters, Mattie and Louise Allison when they visited Europe, not long before WWII (1935, I think). It was typed by someone, perhaps my mom, Katherine Wall C., and I copied it over into Word a few years ago. So here is that letter:

Andrew Allison--passage to New Orleans, LA from
Scotland 1839-1840

Fragment of letter back to Scotland: [typed as is from a handwritten copy, the best we can tell. Dick and Gail C.]

.....mounting beautifully over the tops of them. The waves were dashing over the vessel and some of us got a good ducking. It is truly awfully grand to hear the wind whistling through the sails and to see the sea covered with foam like a field of snow and the waves threatening every moment to devour you. I enjoyed myself very much watching the progress of the vessel and the motion of the billows. We had the last view of land this morning at 8 O'clock we had a glimpse of the Saltee Islands off the coast of Ireland I like to the last. days sickness. had scarcely been in bed before I was roused by the dogs which were again at battle it was very galling no sooner to be in bed than roused by the noise. The passengers were again eager to see the fight. I however separated them and reproved the passengers for the brutal enjoyment which they took in seeing dogs tearing each other. I got little or no sleep all night it was so stormy. On Friday 22nd we got safely out of the Channel which is considered very fortunate at this season of the year. We pass the ship Constellation which left Liverpool 2 days before us headed for St. Johns, New Brunswick. This day has been delightfully warm and the sky at sunset affords us one of the prettiest prospects I have ever beheld; it far surpassed any description I can give you of it. In one place it had a beautiful light blue appearance and the clouds which were bounding the horizon presented all the variagated hues of the rainbow, and the water, by the reflection made on it had the same beautiful appearance. Truly one may admire the wondrous works of God in the mighty deep. I have seen paintings presenting the skies, but none can paint like nature. I thought when looking at the sun that perhaps the eyes of my parents were fixed upon the same object retreating beyond

the lify [sic] Arran hills. It was 12 o'clock ere we three went to bed one feels inclined to sit up all night when the day is so fine. Saturday 23 blowing freshly, wind right ahead, but as we had room to tack about we were making considerable way in the evening it calmed down when we along with the cabin passengers assembled on the deck and had some good singing. C. T. & I were

taken into the cabin and treated very kindly. There were two of the gentlemen who knew my uncle well. They had dined with him the first day he landed there. A great many of the passengers know our friends. They all seem to think N. Orleans especially Natches is not so unhealthy as called. There is a Natches merchant here who is very pleasant man. He says he has enjoyed better health there than ever he did in Britian [sic] and that more bring on diseas [sic] by intemperance in eating and drinking than anything else. Sabbath 24. Wind more favorable and making considerable progress today appeared more like a sabbath as little unnecessary work was done although some were whistling and singing as usual. Just about the time our friends in Scotland would be preparing for church we three sat down at the helm and had some pleasant conversation about our much esteemed friends whom we had left. I almost envied them of the priveledge [sic] which they enjoyed in having a house of prayer to go to. How little we esteem our great priveledges until we are deprived of them and then we know their value, but it is cheering to think that our God is not confined to temples made with hands but that he loves to dwell with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit. I am glad to think that I am remembered in the prayers of the dear friends we had left behind and that we can have an opportunity of meeting a the same throne of grace. Monday 25. Blowing freshly and fair day at noon till Tuesday at noon we made about 240 miles which is about 10 miles pr. hour we are in Late. [sic] 44 and Longe. [sic] 13 Tuesday 26 still blowing very freshly and making 9 Knots pr. hour. Sometimes during the squalls we are making at the rate of 12 knots pr. hour. we passed a large ship at 12 o'clock at night but we did so so quickly that we could not speak her. I saw her pass us for I could not sleep in bed. It is beautiful to see two large ships so closely together in full sail I had no idea that a ship has so many as they have until now. she has 31 or 32 different sails.

p2. [of the typewritten copy]

On Wednesday 27th still blowing we passed a beautiful French bark at 10 o'clock a.m. in fact we pass everyone that comes our way. We have

made more way these three days back than a steamer could do in the same sea at night we were obliged to furl all sails except 3 vis. top gallant sails which were close reefed or tied up so that we were scuding before the wind with only 3 sails up. Latde. 38 Longe. 18. Thursday 28th very calm. I had a very dull day of it sometimes when reading my mind would be carried back to the land of my nativity and to the remembrance of happy by gone days . There are many little things which bring me in remembrance of our family which although in themselves are apparently trivial are nevertheless much felt by me; for instance I require to use a needle and while opening the Cloth which contained them before I was aware a cold thrill passed over my whole frame and then I recollected that I was undoing what either a fond Mother or beloved Sister had last done and many other things strike me the same way. For a few days back we have been making but little way as it is very calm weather, is now very warm. Wednesday 4th Decr. blowing very freshly in the forepart of the day and in the evening it blew a gale accompanied with a great deal of lightning which continued all night. The vessel pitched me so much that I could not sleep so I went on deck and lay over the bows watching the dolphins playing about the bow. the water at night is like as if it were on fire on account of the agitation of the water in Lat. 27 Long. 25. Thursday still blowing very freshly and a good many sick. at 10 o'clock p.m. we spoke the Christian bark from Pt. Glasgow to Montago bay Jamaica after conversing a little we set a few more sail and bid her good bye. On Saturday 7th we got into the trade winds in Lat. 24 deg. 44' Long. 25 deg. 13'. Before this we have in water called the variable winds, now they generally blow from North East which suits us very well. We are going on at a good rate. I saw a whale today at a distance spouting water very high into the air. A large grampus about 50 or 60 ft. long followed us for a considerable way quite close to us sporting about in the mighty deep. Sabbath 8th very little wind. I have on that day finished my 22nd year. I sat down at the stern and read awhile. My thoughts were frequently across the Atlantic to the peaceful home of parents where I had spent some happy days which can never be recalled but if spared I hope yet to return. I sometimes wonder what my different friends would be doing at the time I was thinking upon them and by comparing the difference of time I could almost say what they would be doing unless prevented by disease, viz. attending the house of prayer. On Monday 9th my birth day was held. We baked a pudding and some pastry in honor of me and my health was drunk in a glass of brandy toddy and the health of our friends was not forgot. We passed civilities with two

young Irish ladies who are also cabin passengers we gave them a piece of our pudding and they gave us a piece on one of theirs so we had a day of feasting. That day year I had a choice little party in Glasgow. (that)* I reached my majority on. On Tuesday 10th we spoke an East Indiaman from Batavia to Rotterdam out 82 days Lat. 21 deg. 45' Long. 30 deg. 45'. Wednesday passed a good many vessels homeward bound. Thursday 12th several squalls during the day and a great deal of lightning at night one would have thought that the whole sky was aflame. A great many dolphins flying and sporting about the bows of the boat. For a few days when we should have had the North East we have had Westernly winds which are right ahead and for some days there has been a calm. Monday 16th Lat. 19 very calm and the thermometer stood at 88 in the shade which is such comfortable weather our friends would be chaffing their hands and crying cold. It becomes pleasant and cool in the evening. We spoke a Bermudian [sic] Brig from London for St. Vincent on Wednesday. she was indeed a beautiful brig and gave us a long chase for it for she was a smart sailer.

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About 9 o'clock we passed the bark Elizabeth from Pt. Glasgow to Demerra. I felt my heart warm a little when we passed a Scotch ship. Thursday 19th Lat 18 Long. 41 deg. 10' passed the Sima packet bark from L'pool to Trinidad she left 10 days before us.

Wednesday 25th. Lat. 17 deg. 18' Christmas Day. Thermometer stands at 90 in the shade one is scarcely able to touch surrounding objects they are so warm. Very light wind. Monday 22nd afternoon we got a glimpse of a ship right ahead of us but owing to the light winds we made but little way upon her that day. On Tuesday it freshened a good deal so that we neared her a little and on Wednesday 25th at 7 o'clock p. m. we came up with her and spoke her, and you may guess our surprise when we learned it was the Scotland the one which we intended to have gone with and by missing of which we were so much disappointed. she left L'pool 5 days before us and it is probable that we will be in N. Orleans before her. We spoke her in Lat. 17 deg. 18' and Long. 53. Friday 27th, the vessel is rocking at a great rate, and nearly becalmed. the rocking is a sign that we are drawing near the West Indies. On Saturday the 28th I got up in the morning to see land on our starboard of Left side [sic], and I do assure you it was a gratifying sight to me. The small island of Deseada was the first we saw at a distance. next Guadaloupe [sic] and Antigua. We passed pretty near Antigua and by the aid of the glass we could see the houses and trees along the shore part it is like the Isle of Arran bold

steep hills. We passed Montserrat at dusk so near that we saw fields of sugar-cane and wind mills going and negro houses shaded by beautiful trees we were becalmed within a mile of it and had it not been dark we could have seen the town. On Sabbath we saw Nevis and St. Kitts in the distance. Thermometer 96 in the shade. Monday 30th. Wind blowing freshly and going along at 10 knots pr. hour. We have encountered several squalls and during one of them we lost two of our studding sails. Tuesday the last day of 1839 wind still blowing freshly and making great way which makes up a little for the long time we were driven about by adverse winds. Wednesday which is Newyearsday blowing freshly I got up this morning to see St. Domingo which is under the government of the blacks all along the coast it is very rugged we saw 2 brigs lying along the shore. We were keeping up the old Scotch fashion a little among ourselves. we had no doubt but our friends would be drinking our healths, so we thought we were in duty bound to do the same. we had some short speeches in proposing the healths of our diff. friends, anything to pass the time for one scarcely knows how to do to pass it I feel at night for want of exercise more tired than ever I did after a hard days work except the potatoes houking. There is scarcely a night passes but I dream of home Sometimes I am parting with Mother and Mary and sometimes with Father and Hugh at Ardrossan, and my feelings are touched so much that I awake bathed in perspiration. Sometimes I imagine the ship goes round to Greenock sometimes to Saltcoats and when I go to see my friends and take farewell I'm too late for the boat and miss my passage. William is often at home with me. I must say I still think more of you and family than those I have to meet so soon. On Sabbath 5th we again got a view of land. We saw the Isle of Pines off Cuba. It is very low-lying so much so that for a long time you see nothing but trees and you are close before you see the land it is very thickly wooded. we saw large birds sporting on the trees a flight of flamingoes met us which was a beautiful sight they are quite red all over the body. On Sabbath evening we came close to Cape Antonio the most westerly point of Cuba. We lay to all night as it is dangerous to pass when dark and on Monday morning we passed close to the land lots of pigs running along the shore, but as it was blowing freshly we could not land. After passing around the Cape we were in the Gulph of Mexico but the wind was very unfavourable or rather there is little or no wind. Lots of shellfish called portuguese men of war pass us driven along by a beautiful sail. We have bathed in the Atlantic, Carebean sea and the Gulph of Mexico Wednesday the 8th towards evening making a little way. Thursday doing

well we expect to see land tomorrow. Friday 10th we saw the Belize, one of the mouths of the Mississippi for you must understand it has 3 mouths viz. North East Pass West Pass and South West Pass. There is a bar at each of the passes which is difficult for vessels to pass unless they are lightly laden. We got a pilot for about 30 miles from the Belize but we had to lie about sometimes cruising and sometimes laying at anchor. we tried to get over the bar on Monday night but stuck fast in the mud. We got a tug boat on Tuesday morning and got and lay at anchor at a small village where the pilots had their houses called the Belize we went ashore in the small boat to get a view of the houses, they are very neat but are situated in the middle of the swamps which are so prevalent on the banks of the Mississippi. After the steamer got another ship from the bar we were started together at 5 o'clock p.m. There are some barren looking spots along the bank, there are also some very pretty houses surrounded orange trees, some of which are laden with fruit. The slaves are seen driving carts drawn by mules, horses and oxen. we are within a stone cast of the shore so that we have a good view of everything. It is now very cold people on shore are wrapped in Blankcoats. The glass is as low as 47 which a great difference from what we had it in West Indies, viz. 96. It is a beautiful sight when you come to the Belize you can count about 36 vessels and 10 of these are large ships waiting to be tugged over the bar. The Scotland came to the bar at 12 o'clock that night, on Friday the same day on which we came to the bar, and she ventured over and managed so that she is N. Orleans before us. We see a great many vessels which have lost their masts through stress of weather, the tug boats have a very strang appearance they have two funnels one along side of the other and one behind for steam which continues coughing all the time she is at work owing to her having a high pressure engine. N. Orleans stands 110 above the mouth which we came through. Dear Parents we have got safe to N. Orleans at last and have seen some friends here. I called upon Nugene Turpins and Watt who had instuctions to supply me with anything I might require. Burke Watt & Co. had instructions from Uncle to supply me with any money I might require. I got 100 dollars from N. T. W. and intend going up the river as soon as possible but I require to pass the goods through the Custom house. The Ale and preserves require to be entered and duty paid for them. We have exactly taken two months to come to this place being the 16th. N. Orleans is a beautiful city, there are some splendid buildings although built of brick they look remarkably well. I expect to have a letter from you in a short time when I hope to learn that Mary is better and all the others

are well. Mr. Bain had a letter from Uncle yesterday all well. I will after seeing all friends and be more particular than at present as my mind is so anxious I cannot compose myself. Hugh might write I. Connel at Messrs. H. Monteith & Co., Glasgow, and either let him know some of the particulars or send this to him with instructions only to show it to those who will not criticise as the sea is a bad place for being particular, Our provisions ran short but we were supplied on board with a few small things. Robert Duncan has gone up to the country last summer, I have sent up the letters care of Robert Love and Co., Eddiville, Kentucky, I could not get any instructions about the individual Matthew Brown bid me inquire Tell Mrs. Blair My Dear Parents it is very dull landing in a foreign country, every face strange to you but I hope to be soon among Give my kind love to all friends till I write you I am Dear Parents your Affct. Son

Andw. Allison

*this is awkward without taking out the period here and inserting "that." I checked the typed version that was made from the (lost) handwritten version, and it was the same here as the MS Word version.--DWC, April 2005