

OFFICE OF  
JOSEPH SPENCE  
AGENCY

*This letter was written  
some time between June, 1894  
and May, 1895.*

Will buy and sell Lands, Examine and adjust Land titles, pay Taxes on Lands, and give special attention to the collection of claims against the State. Business in all Departments of the State Government promptly attended to.

AUSTIN, TEXAS, \_\_\_\_\_ 189\_\_\_\_\_

(Note: The above is the copy of the printed letter head on which the following letter is written in ink in her own handwriting by Margaretta Deaderick Wendel Spence, wife of Joseph Spence.)

Dear little Grandchildren

I never supposed I should write a book and indeed I have had such a busy life that I have not had the leisure to decide to do so until now and I might not have thought of it, except that I made the acquaintance of a very intelligent and charming lady five or six years ago who proposed to me to do so - she was a Northern lady and when she came to Texas wanted to learn all she could about the country and as we had lived here thirty years I had known the country when it was very different from what it is now; and as we talked I would tell her of incidents in our life here before and during and after the war and she would say - "how interesting - why don't you write all these things out for your grandchildren?"

When you are older you will, I hope, read "Tales of a Grandfather" written by Sir Walter Scott - he wrote them for his grandson - they are tales about Scotland, the country in which he lived and he wanted his grandson to know about and be interested in the history of his country - just as I hope you will read about and be interested in the history of our country - the United States.

But these Tales of a Grandmother are not about our country; they are about your own Grandfather and myself, your Grandmother, and our sons and daughter - our daughter Lizzie is Aunt Lizzie to some of you and our sons are the fathers respectively of all.

Your Grandfather and I were married March 1st 1853 - we boarded for a year in his brother's house and then Grandfather bought a farm one and one half miles from the little town we lived in - that was M in Tennessee. I was very happy to go to housekeeping and have a home all my own. Grandfather bought cows and horses and pigs and he bought me a good cook - for that was when everybody in the South had slaves - that is, black people to work for them and these black people were bought and sold just like horses and cows - it was not a good way for either the white people or the black people unless the master and mistresses - the white people - were kind and good and even then it was wrong - but everybody had them and we could not set them free and let them stay there.

Well this cook was a nice clean respectable woman and she had no husband or children - her name was Ellen and she was very good except about one thing - at hog-killing time she always said she was sick - the first and second times we thought she was but as she said so every time and she had no fever we thought she was telling stories and only wanted to get off from that work - your parents will tell you all about hog-killing time - it was not pleasant work - indeed it was greasy disagreeable work, making lard and sausage meat, but it had to be done and I used to help about it so as to keep the women and boys at work and get through with it - well as I said Ellen would say she was sick whenever that work had to be done and your Grandfather would feel her pulse and look at her tongue and give her a dose of Castor oil - she always got well by the time that disagreeable work was done. The Fall before we came to Texas - 1859 - we had a great many hogs and as we could not bring them to Texas Grandfather put them up in pens and fattened them and when the weather was cold enough he had sixty of them killed and sold the lard and a quantity of the meat.

Our first little baby was born in M. while we boarded with your Grandfather's brother - we called him James for one of my brothers - but God took him to heaven to live with Him when he was only two and a half months old. When we moved to the country to our farm there was an old but comfortable house of three rooms, and Grandfather had a new kitchen and storeroom built - the storeroom joined our room

and just back of the storeroom was the kitchen - remember this because after awhile I shall have something more to tell you about those rooms.

In the Spring when we moved to the farm of course we wanted to make a garden - I wanted Strawberries and raspberries and I took a negro boy with me to the woods on the farm and dug up the wild strawberry and raspberry plants and set them out in the garden - we found plenty of flowers in the old garden - blue bells, star of Bethlehem, daffodils, or as we children used to call them when I was a little girl - golden candlesticks - butter and eggs and cups and saucers - and there were roses and jessamine and snowballs and syringas and other kinds - Grandfather had the vegetable seeds sowed and attended to - there were plenty of blackberry vines in the woods but they grew everywhere in woods and neglected fields and we would gather the berries them when they were ripe - so I did not have any put in the garden - Before we were married your Grandfather owned a mulatto boy named Tobe - he was a pretty bad boy, his father was my father's coachman and body servant - we had no ice and no spring house as many people had, because we had no and to keep the milk cool and sweet for supper I put it in a long tin bucket and made Tobe hang in pretty low down in the well - and it was not very long before we found that when Tobe would come from the field hot and thirsty, he would draw up the bucket and take a drink of cool sweet milk and of course he would get the cream for that was on top - the well was in the orchard and we could not see it from the house very well - so I bought a little padlock and locked the milk in the bucket - but Tobe did so many bad things that Grandfather sold him and he was the only slave your Grandfather ever sold, except a woman and her little child he sold to the gentlemen who owned her husband when we were coming to Texas, because he thought it was wrong to separate them.

Do you remember about our room and the storeroom all joining in a row? Well, one night about eleven o'clock we were wakened by some one on the road calling out "fire! fire!" Grandfather jumped up and opened the door to look out and it was our kitchen on fire - he told me and I jumped up and put on some clothes while he ran to the negro houses to wake them up. I did not know what I was doing until I had put on my shoes and stockings, but by the time I was fully dressed I was calm and composed and commenced carrying out the things from the house - and the people from town and the neighborhood helped me so that we saved some of the clothing and furniture which was downstairs but everything upstairs was burned for the house was an old one and burned rapidly - many things up upstairs I valued very much because they had been my father's and mother's - our house was about a mile and a half from town and there was no fire company nor engine in the town so there was no chance to save the house - somebody took me to town to my brother's where I stayed until Grandfather could have a small house of two rooms which was on another part of our land, moved

The week before the house burned I had gone to Nashville and bought a cedar chest to pack clothes in that was upstairs and in it I had put nine white counterpanes - seven of which my mother had had woven - and several quilts she had pieced together and a long fine tablecloth which had been hers and other things I thought a great great deal of, but they were all burned.

I had bought also in Nashville a sugar stand which would hold 200 lbs of sugar and had just had it filled - that of course was in the storeroom and I had a good many ducks - they would roost under the house, so they were all burned.

Our three little babies who died and went to Heaven were born in that house - James lived two months and a half - Sally lived one hour - David lived seven months - Joseph - Margaret's and Mary Bain's father was born in the new house.

Our house was about a mile and a half from town and there was no fire company nor engine in the town so there was no chance to save the house - somebody took me to town to my brother's where I stayed until Grandfather could have a small house of two rooms which was on another part of our land, moved into the yard - then we went to housekeeping again - that was in September 1856 - and the next Summer Grandfather had a large and handsome brick house, two stories high and a large attic above, built - the dining room pantry and storeroom were in the L and only one story high, but the house was so high off the ground that there was a nice room under the L part partly above and partly underground with a fireplace in it which we thought would make a nice laundry or place to

wash and iron clothes - this room was eleven feet high - before we got to housekeeping in the new house however there came a spell of rainy weather and water rose in the laundry until it was seven feet deep and it stayed there so long Grandfather thought there must be a spring down there - a drain had to be dug to get the water out - as soon as all the rooms were finished except the parlor we had moved in - that was not finished until we had sold the place which we had to do the next year because Grandfather and his brother who were in business together failed and we had to sell the place to pay the debts - that was in the Spring of 1859 - and Grandfather ~~thm~~ thought he would like to move out to Texas - and as he did not want to decide about it until he had seen the country, he came to Texas in April 1859 and traveled through the State for a month - he liked the country and thought Austin was such a pretty place and the land was good around it that he concluded to move here and went back to Tennessee to bring us and our household goods and we came in the Fall.

My brother William and another friend ~~of~~ arranged it so that Grandfather could keep all his negroes and Grandfather wanted his sister "Aunt Charlotte" you know - to come with us and we had some horses and household goods to bring, so he thought it would be better to come over land - there were no railroads then in the South and we had a carriage and a buggy for ourselves and Aunt Charlotte and her son and Grandfather's other sister Sally, who died before any of you were born, to ride in and there were two large four horse wagons, and an ambulance for the negroes and the bed clothes and tents and dishes and eatables - so we left Tennessee on the 18th of September 1859 - every night we would camp - that is stop on the side of the road - the tents would be spread and our beds made in them then the negroes would make a big fire on the ground and the cook would get supper then feed the horses - and so we traveled every day except Sundays and camped every night.

I was not very well and when we had been traveling ten days and were in Northern Alabama and had camped for the night, I was taken very sick - I was better in the morning but as it was not far by railroad to Oxford Mississippi where I had a brother living, Grandfather thought it would be better to let the others stay in camp all day and take me to my brother's and after the all got to Texas and had rented a house I could come out by water - I stayed at my brother's two or three weeks and then went up into West Tennessee to visit one of my sisters where I stayed until the latter part of November - my brother James came up there to see me and my brother William tried to find someone going to Texas by water who would be suitable company for me, but there were not so many people traveling about then as there are now - and as he could not find suitable company for me and Joseph and the nurse he came with us himself and we reached Austin the last of November - we came down the Mississippi River from Memphis to New Orleans, then took the cars across the river to Brashear City and there took a steamer and crossed the Gulf of Mexico to Galveston - then a steamboat up Buffalo Bayou to Houston - there we found the only railroad in the State of Texas at that time - it was 50 miles long and took us from Houston to Hempstead. It was not a very good railroad at first I suppose and at that time was in bad condition - it took us five hours to go the 50 miles to Hempstead - there we took the stage for Austin about 12 o'clock one day and the next morning we reached we reached a little town called Evergreen - I think there were only three or four houses in the town - so we stopped there for breakfast and as I was not very well I did not enjoy the breakfast which consisted of big biscuit nearly an inch thick and yellow as gold with soda and chunks of fat pork swimming about in the greasiest kind of gravy and black coffee - the chunks of meat were nearly as big as my fist and that was put upon the table in a large wooden bowl.

After breakfast we got into the stage again and rode all that day and that night until 2 o'clock in the morning when we reached Austin and stopped at a hotel - a large frame house which was so crowded that I and little 2 year old Jo, Margaret's father, had to be put into a room with a Spanish girl - it was a comfortable room and the Spanish girl was very nice and pleasant and very pretty - she was the sister of the Spanish Interpreter in the Land Office. Next morning directly after breakfast Grandpapa came with the carriage and took us to the house he had rented and where Aunt Charlotte and cousin William Hamilton and Aunt Sally and the negroes were - it was not a very nice house and there were only four rooms two on the ground and two above and the stairs were outside - but it was the only house in town for rent at that time, because the Legislature was to meet in three days on December 3rd after I reached here and Governor Houston was to be

inaugurated and so many people had come to the inauguration that the town was full - and for the same reason the stage was crowded all the way from Hempstead.

My brother William only stayed with us a day or two and then went back to Mississippi - We lived in that house until the 1st of January and then Grandpapa rented a very comfortable house where we lived for two years and where Wendel, Linda's father, was born - there was a cistern on that place and the people who had lived there before us had a good many negroes and a good many of them were children and I suppose the children amused themselves by throwing things into the cistern; because the second Winter we all had Typhoid fever and Grandpapa came ~~xxx~~ very near dying - one of the negro girls died. After we all got well Grandpapa had the cistern cleaned out and they got old boots and rusty tin buckets and pans, sticks and various things out of it so it was no wonder we had Typhoid fever - for you know bad water is very apt to make Typhoid fever.

Grandpapa wanted to buy a place in the country, but he said he did not want to buy in a hurry, but would take time to look around and get a place that we would always like - the last year we lived at this rented place he bought the place in the woods 2 1/2 miles East of town where you have all been - and where we have lived 35 years and it is the old homestead yet, though it is not like the old home since Grandfather died last May. <sup>(1904)</sup> When he bought the land it was all woodland and he had trees cut down to make logs to build a house first for the negroes - but before the house was finished the war commenced and Grandpapa said we would live in the log cabin and he would get some rough plank and have a house built for the negroes - a log cabin is not a very pretty house and it is hard to keep clean because little worms bored holes in those Elm logs which made sawdust and the daubing and mortar between the logs often breaks off and falls on the floor - but it is a comfortable house - warm in Winter and cool in Summer because the walls are so thick and we had large fireplaces and plenty of wood to burn - for a long time there were only two rooms, but we lived in that house for twelve years and after Robert, Joseph Sherman's father, and Lizzie came the house was too small, so Grandpapa added a dining room and store room and a small bedroom of rough planks - these rooms were about a foot lower than the log rooms - you must remember that because when I tell you about the river rising and breaking its banks and coming in the house you will understand why it came into the plank rooms and only just under the floor of the log rooms - then after awhile David and Harry were born and we had a houseful but we were ~~xxx~~ happy for the children were good and we all loved each other.

Grandpapa leased a ranch above 30 miles from Austin on the Peder-nales river before he bought our land - for Aunt Charlotte and aunt Sally and cousin William to live on - and Grandpapa and the children and I used to go up there every Summer- The Comanche Indians used to go through the pasture at the ranch and one day just after Grandpapa and Jo and Wendel had passed on one side of Shingle mountain on the road to the ranch, the Indians passed on the other side and killed a man - I used to be afraid every time I passed a clump of bushes on the road that Indians would jump out and attack us, but I never saw a wild Indian - I think God always took care of us, for I always asked him to do so when we started - we rode up in an ambulance drawn by two mules named Jack and Gabe - Jack was a lazy fellow and going up hill or traveling on level ground Jack would let Gabe do most of the pulling but going down hill Jack would hold back finely. Your Aunt Charlotte had a negro boy named George about as old as Joseph and when we went to the ranch Jo and Wendel and George would wander about and knock wasp nests out of the trees, gather Mexican persimmons and Mexican currants or Chapparal berries as they were called - one evening after Sundown Wendel came in crying - he had eaten the fruit of the prickly pear cactus and his tongue was full of the little fine spines or stickers off the fruit - another time Joseph and Wendel and George had been ~~xxx~~ knocking wasp nests and a wasp stung Joseph in the middle of the forehead and his head was pretty big - another the boys climbed up in a ~~xxx~~ tree and Wendel fell out on the stones below and cut the back of his head so that it bled very freely, but Joseph and George took him to a branch of water not far off and washed the blood off ~~xxx~~ until it quit bleeding and then brought him to the house.

( The letter stops at this point and it was evidently Grandmother's intention to continue later, as the letter is not signed. If any of the grandchildren would like additional copies for their children, just let me know.

T. R. Spence, College Station, Texas, March 1, 1942.