

Letters Home dated 1880, 1882 and 1884 from Capt. Henry W. Lawrence

Henry Watson Lawrence was born in 1850, son of Francis Lawrence of Falmouth, Nova Scotia and Mary Barron of Saint John, New Brunswick. His father, Francis, was a ship's carpenter and had nine children, of which Henry was the third.

Henry (Harry) Lawrence married Clara Churchill (1859-1935) on 23 November 1876 in the Hantsport Baptist Church. Clara was the daughter of George W. Churchill and Susannah Davison.

They had four children: Susie (1877-1881), Ethel (1881-1960), Norah (1884-1971) and Harry (1885-1940). Henry Lawrence spent his adult life as a seafarer and quickly rose to become Captain of his own vessel, as did three of his four brothers. He sailed for E. Churchill & Sons of Hantsport. He died 23 November 1885, at the age of 35. It is believed he succumbed to tuberculosis after having unsuccessfully taken a "rest cure" at a sanatorium somewhere in New York state.



These letters were in the possession of his daughter, Norah Armstrong of Falmouth. The typewritten transcripts have been presented by his grandson, Harry B. Armstrong and great-grandson, Lawrence A. Armstrong of Falmouth.

Bark "Plymouth"
Portishead Dock
Nov. 29th, 1880

My sweet dear wife

I went up to Bristol this morning & went in the office as big as life to get my letters but low & behold you there was none for me. I droped my tail & began to think awhile. So after a while I began to think that we came to quick. I inquired when the next mail was due from Halifax, they told me there was a mail due on Wednesday that is day after tomorrow. So I am looking for that day to arrive. The cook got a letter that arrived here Saturday. There was not any papers from New York which I near always get on arrival.

The Ship "Berty Biglow" Ship "Maple Taylor" & Bark "Calcutta" are laying here, they have only been here a week you mind when we was towing up to York we passed the "Mable Taylor" towing out the "Berty Biglow" left the next day. And here they only began to discharge Friday. The "Athlon" left a good while before I arrived in York for this side & aint arrived yet. The Bark "John A. Harvie" left York the day the "Bristol" did & last Friday she went ashore on the east coast of Ireland & became a total wreck. The crew did not get off the wreck untill Saturday. The Capt had his wife & Sister on board. You know the night we went on board "Bristol" we had to go acrost a vessels deck to get to the "Bristol" Well that was the "John A. Harvie" which is now a total wreck.



Maritime Museum of the Atlantic/Musée maritime de l'Atlantique
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Painting of barque *John A. Harvie* by F. Wettering. Launched at Avondale in 1876, she crossed the Atlantic 21 times before being wrecked in 1880.

The fate of the *John A. Harvie* was recounted in some detail by the *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*:

November 25 1880, 1:35 pm. A barque with foremast cut away. Apparently full of water and flying a foreign flag is ashore head to sea by her anchor off Tacumshane; heavy sea on; crew still on board; vessel beyond reach of rocket apparatus.

November 25, 8:25 p.m. Barque offshore off Tacumshane is probably the *John A. Harvie* from New York.

November 26, 7:15 p.m. The barque offshore off Tacumshane yet holds on, but likely to become a total wreck. Name on stern as made out by telescope reads *John A. Harvie* (Windsor, N.S.). Lifeboat gone to rescue.

On 29 November *Lloyd's List* reported the loss, and its rather fortunate outcome:

Wexford, November 27, 11:50 a.m. – JOHN A. HARVIE. Succeeded after trying night in landing crew of *John A. Harvie* by Lifeboat at 7:50 a.m. All saved, 15 men and two women.

In fact the crew list contains seventeen names, but it appears there were no fatalities in this incident. One of the 'two women' mentioned was probably Captain Lockhart's wife, Eliza. After two trying nights in the wreck the crew was paid off immediately on coming ashore, receiving any money that was due to them, which in nine cases amounted to nothing at all. Other sums paid out ranged from £15 14s 5d for the mate, George Brison, to £1 3s 6d for Arthur Pepper, the cabin boy. Pepper was seventeen years old, and this was the first time he had been to sea. The *John A. Harvie* on the other hand, had made twenty crossings of the North Atlantic. She failed to complete her twenty-first.

The Bristol passed Flushing on the 26th & we passed Lundy Island the same day. The John Mann passed dover 27th for London. I dont see the Swansea's arrival any where yet.

Well Pet I dont suppose you care much to hear about these Ships so I will change the subject. I mailed a letter this morning to you & one to your Pa. My poor Gull was found dead this morning in a tub of water. I put him in last evening to show the officer how to swim & forgot to take him out so that was the last of poor Mr. Gull. The two old hens are as happy as can be but do not lay. I think we must of killed the two best ones. It costs me 9^d to go to Bristol & 9^d to come back so that is quite a lot of money. It is a fine quiet place here. The little village is about one mile from here, there is only about two dozen houses in it. This dock is as dear as Bristol, the dock charges I mean.

Ballast is 1/4 per ton & it is like marsh mud. I will try & get some Iron for Ballast if I can. I can not work my men at the cargo as the dock company dose the work. Coming down in the cars this evening there was two old ladys in the same car & one of them was crying like everything. I asked the other lady what was the mater & she told me that her son & another Pilot got washed overboard off a Pilot Boats deck & was drowned last Thursday I tell you they have had some awful bad weather here in the channel. I expect old Jack Frost is around Hantsport now. I wish I was there frost or no frost. How is dear little Susie. How I would like to see you & her. I hope she is smart again. I don't know where Albert went from home but I hope your letters will contain all the news.

I was awful put aback in finding no letters here to meet me for I told you to write as soon as you got my last letter. Maybe they will all be here in a bunch. I will still live in hopes for I know there is letters on the way for me. I am very anxious to know how you got home & how you suceeded in talking house to your Pa. I would sooner have a house of my own to go in when I came home.

I hope you will send me word if you want anything from here. I guess I will get you & little Sue a Christmas present here any how. I expect they all was glad to see you. I guess you will not want to come with me again for I guess you think it is better to be at home. I aint going to put my carpet down here this time for the dock is dirty & it will spoil it. I don't think I will have many visitors here for it is an out of the way place.

The "Lily" only left here about a month ago for the West Indies.

You see I am getting down towards the bottom of my paper & it is half past eight so I will stop for this time & wait untill I get a letter from you as I feel lonesome.

I know you will send me some letters for you can let one of the little ones hold Sue while write, how I would like to have one of your letters this evening to read.

I wish you was here dear pet. I did not think I would miss you so much as I do but I hope I will soon have the pleasure of seeing you soon again. Little Sues Show is still on the window sill. Well pet I will go to bed & dream about you if I can.

Give my love to all & keep a lot for
yourself & little Susie the sweet pet. I
suppose she will forget all about her Pa.

from Harry

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Barque "Plymouth"
Avonmouth
Sept. 11th, 1881

My dear wife

You see that we are still at this place. My lay days are up tomorrow & we will finish discharging tomorrow if all goes well. Then take on board some Iron & get away next week if we possible. Then I will be once more on my way home to my little wife & Baby. I dont think I will get any more letters here this time. I have had a good many. So I am not going to say a word about letters. I see by some of the papers that the new Bark is called the "Shetland" & some say it is the "Scotland". But I think "Scotland" is right Shetland is the prettiest name of the two I think. I expect poor old Capt. Munroe is proud of her & so he should be for she is a fine Ship.

I expect Albert is on his way across by this time. I have been looking for the arrival of the "Swansea" everyday but have not as yet saw any thing of her. we killed our old rooster the other day & it was awful tough. I bought another one & now the old Copenhagen hen layed we got two eggs yesterday & today. So you see the old rooster was no good. I expect Folley is a married woman by this time. Tell her I want a peice of her cake. I see by the Windsor mail that your Pa is building a wharf & is going to build a tug or a passenger boat. If I don't hurry up & go home I will not know Hantsport.

I have got the two lockets & chains for the little girls. Maybe I payed to much for them over £6.00 apiece. £12.10 for the lot but they are nice ones. The other day I was washing my hands with Soap & while my hands was wet & slippery my ring came off & I lost it. I near cryed. But I suppose it can not be helped as it is the first & only thing I ever lost, to my knowledge. I got a tooth filled in Hamburg & all the filling has come out. So there is more expense but I will not get it filled here as I ain't got the money to spare. I expect by the time we get back it will be cold weather again. Mercy how the time flies.

The "Plymouth" will soon be two years old & it dose not appear to be six months since I left home.

I would like to see you very much for I am awful lonesome by times, but I have to get over it the best way I can.

I hope it will not be long before we will see each other or until then I say good afternoon with best respects to all & love to you & Baby.

I am still your own
Harry

Ship "Austria"
Norfolk
Dec. 5th, 1884

My dear Clara

I was very happy and glad to find a letter for me from you this morning when I went in the office. I am very sorry that I will soon have to do without your letters for awhile as we are near loaded but if all goes well I will get some on the other side. This is Friday evening and we will be loaded Monday if nothing happens and then away for Liverpool, go up to Andrew Gibsons and get some more letters from my little wife with good news. I was thinking to day how some men live with there wifes. I dont know but it must be awful way to live.

We have a sailor on board by the name of Rogers. (the name is enough) he was the last man I shiped leaving home he married a Miss Davison from back on the mountain. You have often saw her father in Hantsport with wood to sell he wears his hair long & bushy. Well it appears that this sailor has left or she left him two or three times since he has been married, but when he left to come in this ship he left his wife boarding with Capt. Marsters on the hill, the blind man. So when we got here he left me a letter to mail for his wife & he has no answer to it yet, he got mad drew \$5.00 last Saturday night & did not get on board again untill some time Sunday. And near every even-
ing he is off to the Theatre or seeing the girls he spends his money as fast as he earns it the little fool.

I will stop this subject and commence some thing else. I am all alone in my after Cabin sitting on one of your mothers Parlor chairs with a home made shade on the lamp chimney scratching away while the noise of the old Cotton press & the darkeys trucks wheeling

Cotton on the dock & on board of barges is rattling away wake up any time of the night you can hardly get to sleep again for the noise.



Cotton Docks, Norfolk Virginia ca 1890 (Library of Congress)

I will ship my crew tomorrow if I can get them. I only want six men I have all the rest on board. Oh I tell you we will have a bouncer of a pig to kill Christmas if all goes well you would not know that it was the same pig to see it now & the dog is growing fast & is going to make a fine fellow.

The hens take charge of the top of the fore house. Oh yes I must not forget the Cats they are doing well but forsaken me & took to the Galley. Capt Porter is still here & I think pretty uneasy about his vessel she has not turned up yet been out 65 days other ships left the same time as she did and is here & loaded, but I guess she will turn up all right as she is slow. I expect your Pa has left New York for home by this time.

The cook has just came down & he is getting his writing material ready to write he has only been on shore once since we arrived & then I sent him to market, he is a good cook trusty & honest. The boy is like all the rest of his colour dirty as can be. I caught him today empting the slops out of the glasses back in the pitcher & then wiping them with some rag. I went for him & frightened him out of a years growth. It is no use to talk to him for he lets it in one ear & out of the other. I did not touch him but threatened what I would do but it is no use.

I heard that is was old Mrs. Delap that lived in Shaws house & had throwed out the hot ashes by the barn & away it went. Oh Cally be carefull with fire, wont you? It is an awful thing to get burnt out.

Your Pa said that he would send you some wood when he got home for Capt Bobby to cut so he would not get lonesome. Poor Lide how foolish she is to be so ugly, but maybe it is right. Does Ethel go up to her shop now be careful that she has on her hat & cloak. I expect Nora can say a good many words by this time, the dear little pet. I expect they will forget all about me soon.

If Lill & Laura both go on to New York the poor old "Swansea" will be taking. She aught to have some of my room in her cabin.

It is now 8 pm bed time. So good night my sweet wife with a lot of kisses for you & our two little girls. Love to all from me.
ha! ha! ha!