

The Pettit letters to Foote
Transcribed by Doug Shepard, 2015

James **Pettit** from Fredonia (Chautauqua County) NY and his son Eber **Pettit** from Versailles (Cattaraugus County) were confirmed Underground Railroad conductors and/or stationmasters. The following two items in the handwriting of James **Pettit** and three items in the handwriting of Eber **Pettit** are found in the anti-slavery collection of [the Foote papers](#), the papers of Judge E. T. **Foote** of Jamestown (Chautauqua County) NY.

The first is a letter from James **Pettit** to Judge **Foote**, transcribed as follows:

Fredonia

July 27th 44

*Dear Bro. **Foote***

Yours of the 21st inst is gratefully rec'd. The cause is big with hope when Christians Come to it seems with great & willing hearts or when ___ persons ___ it consent In the strength of the Lord only can it succeed. For save ___tional sin is ___ rested in the national heart & lamentably so in the ___. 'Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer & fasting.'

*A severe injury on my leg confining me to my room ever since I saw you must apologize for the paucity of this letter. I shall be out I hope in a few days. Elder **Galusha** is gone to Ohio, & as it is important that an able lecturer be presented? for this Co [County] will it not be well for us both to announce the fact to C O Shepard Esq of Arcade & request his aid in the premises ? to arrange with Mr **Ward** to spend some two weeks at least with us the latter part of August (after harvest), & if ok, we will ___ty A Co meeting at Ripley or Westfield the day before or after (as the case may be) the Bible as?[Associations?] meetings. Notice to be made in all the papers. I will correspond with Mr S__ today.*

*I rejoice Dear Sir at the encouraging prospects before you. Persevere in the great work of our brothers, so redemption from the thraldom we have imposed. Papers & c must be Scattered over the Co. The Spirit of enquiry is awake. Let it be satisfied tho at some personal sacrifice There ought to be 200 of the **Birney** advocate taken in this Co, & even more [sold?] A faithful _____? But go to work.*

*They begin to talk of Mr **Birneys** ___ In Mass, in 44. A great revolution is evidently on its topic, the hireling rags? are? Beginning to bow before the majesty of truth?, & the light of constitutional law. I do not despair of the republic, for there are in the masses? yet left some relyable? conscience. Party maneuvering had almost extinguished it, blinded & perverted it. A sorceress had tampered with, but Not obliterated it. The image of his Maker will beat the ___. All that is needful*

is to clear away his political dregs & chaff & bring out into holy & moral effect the gold and the wheat, then we shall "Be men as trees walking." with giant strides to the deliverance of our enslaved? brother, & the suppression of that fiend-like spirit generated in A ___ public voice at the dictum of the slave power written in the ashes of Pennsylvania Hall? & now boasting of its conquest over the evil? & _____ power of the City of brotherly love _____restoration of their _____ .

Most Respectfully yours Jas Pettit

P.S. I sent you a package of A S [anti-slavery] papers. Are they worth the postage?

The second, a letter from James **Pettit** to **Foote**, is transcribed as follows:

Fredonia

Nov 11th 44

Bro Foote

Mr. J. Lester Esq PM at this place kindly caused your letter sent to him to be placed in my hands, to which I reply as far as informed Viz I send you a report of 5 Towns I was unable definitely to obtain the true report of the Liberty vote even in this, The whigs who had appeared (?) to reign triumphant before election, are remarkably indisposed since to review its results. They seem to care but little about its details. The almighty has sent A withering blight upon their efforts, & ever will on any party who, to carry out A wicked purpose, perfidiously resort to the most reckless calumnies, perjuries & slanders of men unchangeably consecrated to the cause of human rights to sustain a corrupt cause. It is not to be doubted that their sheer fabrication of slanders of Birney the just, have lost them their idol. Their last great lie lost them 10,000 votes in the state. The mark of Cain was stamped upon it. It is praiseworthy in our democratic friends, that altho we disagree in many things, they exercise courteousness towards Liberty men. They know our principles & approve them, altho in their application we may differ.

A great national crisis is rapidly developing. The issue is made, & its result to this great people will shew whether for the establishing of inalienable rights to all men or the perpetuity of slavery. Mr. Coleman of Ellicottville last eve informed me the Lib vote in that Co is 500. Respectfully yours J Pettit

The following is all I have learnt

Pomfret 28

Sheridan 8

Hanover 12

Arkwright 28

Portland not heard

Stockton 1

[Written vertically to the left of this list:] common Report only

The third was written from Eber **Pettit** to **Foote**. It is undated but bears the following note, which was most likely added by **Foote's** son Horace when he made a finding aid for the collection many years later: "E. M. **Pettit** & others in relation to raising money to purchase the liberty of a slave his wife Joseph **Norton**."

Dear Sir

*Having recd another letter from Mr. **Chaplin** stating that a written contract is made with the master of Josefs wife that he will take \$300 if paid by the 14th inst we are making an extra effort & Joseph [**Norton**] & myself will continue to labor to procure the necessary funds the same as tho this arrangement were not made & in fact without knowing that it is made & I have no doubt the funds will be raised to meet the payt soon if not within the 30 ds, Yours truly, E. M. **Pettit**.*

On the same sheet of paper, in the same handwriting as **Pettit's** above, the following note, purportedly from **Norton** to **Foote**:

*Hon. E. T. **Foote***

Dear Sir, should I fail to collect all the money necessary to pay for Mary & our boy I will work it out at the end of my fingers & I shall feel much obliged if you can aid me at this time.

*Joseph **Norton***

The fourth, a letter to **Foote** transcribed as follows, bore the signatures of Eber **Pettit** and four other men.

Ellicottville

Feb. 6. 1845

*To Elial T. **Foote***

Dear Sir

*We have concluded to make an effort to raise the balance of the money necessary for the purchase of the wife and child of Joseph **Norton**. Mr. **Petit** has now in his hands \$100. We will raise \$100 here, & if you will undertake to raise \$100 in your section. The proposition is for you & some of your friends to write to Mr. **Tyler** to advance the money to Mr. **Chaplin**, with an assurance that it shall be reimbursed in 30 days. The amount on hand will be paid over, -- we will be responsible for \$100, more, & you must risk the balance. He is to continue the effort to raise the money, to pay the amount advanced, and we think it can be very nearly collected within the time above mentioned, so that we may not be called upon. Yours respectfully, B. **Chamberlain**, W.P. **Angel**, H. **Colman**, E. M. **Pettit**, E. S. **Colman***

P.S. Should you prefer to have us write to Mr. Tyler, we will do so, upon receiving the assurance from you to raise \$100 –Yours, Angel

The fifth item, a letter from Eber **Pettit** to **Foote**, is transcribed as follows:

Versailles

April 25, 1845

Hon. E. T. Foot [sic]

*My Dear Sir, Your favor of the 3rd inst is just put into my hands, (9 O.C.P.M.)and as the mail leaves here tomorrow morning I have but little time to write. I recd a letter March 17, from brother **Chaplin**, saying that he, with Mary & the boy would be in Utica the 13th & before I had finished reading it Joseph [**Norton**] who had been on a trip into Erie, Wyoming & Genesee Cos arrived having traveled on foot from Buffalo. He was overjoyed to hear the glad news & as he had collected all he could in this country it was thot best by the friends here that he should go & meet his wife & try to obtain the bal in Oneida & Madison Cos. He paid into my hands sufficient to cancel his debt for the loan less \$37.35. Tired & foot-sore as he was he started that evening for Buffalo on foot intending to take the cars the next day for Utica where he arrived in safety & found his wife & boy well & happy, as you will see by the Liberty Press I send you, you will also see that he is at work. I have the fullest confidence in Joseph & shall expect to see him here as soon as he can obtain the bal of the money, his wife's expenses from Washington to Utica, he will have to raise also. I am happy to learn that our good cause is gaining ground in Chaut which is true also of this Co & I believe generally thro the country, **Goodells** Constitutional argument is doing wonders. It upsets the strong men. The press as you justly observe is the great engine with which this great moral battle is mostly to be fought, & I heartily wish all our friends took the same view of the matter that you do. What a preposterous idea that the fathers of the Revolution should have made a compromise in the Constitution, with the intent to perpetuate the abominable system of Slavery. It is a base slander nothing of the kind is to be found in that document, if it were so, instead of holding an annual jubilee & glorifying the heroes of the Revolution, it were better to teach our children to trample on their ashes & spit upon their tombstones. No, no! the scorn & contempt of the world shall yet be felt by those [who] would gladly shuffle off their own responsibility upon the heads of the Pa[t]riots of former days. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here before long. We can get up a meeting any time & you can do much good in this region by giving us a few lectures, present our kindest regards to your family. Very Respectfully, your Brother in the Lord & the cause of truth, E. M. **Pettit**.*