

Robinson and Van Lear – Three Letters

Between 1815 and 1829 three letters were exchanged between Jacob Van Lear of Augusta county Virginia, James Robinson of Missouri and James' likely son, George Robinson. James Robinson was probably born between 1770 - 1780 in Virginia. At this point very little is known about him, but he is very important to my Robinson and Van Lear story! This James Robinson was brought to my attention by Van Lear researcher, Russell Reed. All that I know about this James Robinson comes from the letters that were exchanged between him and Jacob Van Lear. I do not know how this James Robinson fits into a larger Robinson family. James Robinson's 1829 letter to his "Brother" Jacob Van Lear, places James Robinson in Caledonia, Washington county Missouri. This same letter mentions two sons George I Robinson of Ste Genevieve county Missouri, and Vail K Robinson of Vicksburg Mississippi. Who is this James Robinson?

Portions of the three letters are given below, with notes following.

Letter #1, Jacob Van Lear to James Robinson, August 1815.

Augusta County JacobsBurgh [Virginia]
August 6th 1815

Brother James

It is with pleasure . . .

. . . I am a husband and a father I have been better than eighteen months married have a son large and healthy looking for his age. Have named him John Addison Tate . The family I married in you perhaps knew a daughter of John Tates Decd [.] Sister Sally is also married neerly two years she married a Davis son of William Davis our near neighbour. She has also a son who they call James Robinson after yourself. Sister Caldwell is in health and had three healthy stout boys the youngest only a few weeks old.

I have to inform you of the death of Aunt Robinson except whom all my relations are well. Father is more stout and healthy than you might expect from his age and the weekness of his constitution. Mother is also stout and healthy for her age and looks not mutch older I think than when you last saw her . . .

. . . is the wish of your brother. Jacob VanLear

Letter #2, George Robinson to Jacob Van Lear Jr - August 1827

John Robinson (in Greenville, Wayne county Missouri)

to - "Dear Uncle and Aunt", Jacob Van Lear Jr.

After an interval of some months I again address you. I should have written you long since but I was unsettled and could not write until I was in business. In last June, I bought medicine, books, instruments

ect. and journeyed south, and tarried not until I reached this place, where I have located myself perhaps permanently.

Remember me to all my friends, and relatives, particularly to Grand Mother. I will come and see you in about 4 years if I prosper. Perhaps I will fetch bring a little Spanish girl to call you Aunt & Uncle.

I remain your affectionate nephew George Robinson Delemonde

Addressed to: Mr Jacob VanLear, Greenville, Augusta Cty, Virginia

Letter #3, James Robinson to Jacob Van Lear, February 1829(?)

James Robinson (Missouri) to Jacob Van Lear (Virginia), 1829: (note that the date on closing says 1839)

New Caledonia Feb 9, 1829. Washington County Missouri

Dear Brother Jacob

Our neighbour W. Thomas went last summer from hence to Augusta. I have not seen him since his return which was in the latter end of fall. He might give us some account perhaps how you are. I wrote by him but got no letter in return . .

Miss Mary Henderson has been to see us. I was not at leisure and made but few inquiries. We heard you were not all dead .

. . . Capt. William Shields arrived here and as far as I know all in health. He has made choice of a place and has settled down. I think he acted prudently. His son William and brother a young blacksmith are both living in this town and have a smith shop. From their habits of industry will do well . . .

. . . coffee, tea and sugar [drams?] I drink none I am confined during the week in school and the exercise of hunting is a salutary recreation. I am very healthy but my sight is failing. I wear spectacles.

. . . I should be very happy to see your lady. Tell her I mean to stop over and take an evening cup of tea with her. Our son George I. Robinson is in Ste. Genevieve County 40 miles eastwardly from here in a settlement called New Tennessee. He is postmaster. The name of his office is Bolivar to whom I request you will direct your letters. He is in the practice of medicine. He succeeds well, is very steady and makes money.

Vail K. Robinson is in the State of Mississippi at the Walnut Hills in the Town of Vicksburg. He is on the study of medicine. We have not seen him these three years. His talents are respectable. He is virtuous and his studious habits well render him capable. His last letter bore date Christmas 1828. Radishes & Lettice were then in perfection and roses were in bloom. This is a country of figs but rather too far north for sugar cane. He wrote that he had a few weeks previous to his writing amputated a mans leg. Docter Anderson with whom he studies being sick. The patient done well. There are ten Doctors in the Town where he resides. Mrs Robinson has been for some years afflicted with Rheumatism but much worse this winter than usual. She is much crippled with this acute disease. We pass our time with as much happiness and perhaps more than many who are surrounded by wealth and repose in the lap of

luxury. If I had at this time some money I could make an advantageous purchase in this place but when money cannot be had I draw bills on content for the deficit. These draughts are never protested. Mrs. Robinson joins me in the pleasing duty of presenting you and your Lady with our warm and respectful compliments. Tell Dear mama we both say GOD bless her. Give compliments to all my old friends.

Dear BROTHER adieu, may prosperity and happiness be yours is a wish nearest the heart of. James Robinson

[address]

Jacob Van Lear, Virginia, Augusta County, Christians Creek.
Staunton Post Office

[from]

New Caledonia, Mo
Feb 12th 1839

Questions (and thoughts) suggested by these letters:

How is James Robinson related to Jacob Van Lear (born 1789, Virginia)? In the letters, they referred to each other as "brother". Consider step-brother, half-brother, member of his parent's household, distant relative, friend.

James Robinson probably came from Augusta county Virginia to Washington county Missouri, perhaps between 1815-1825. His son George Robinson seems to have lived in Virginia long enough to remember friends and family there.

Why did two of Jacob Van Lear's sisters (Arabella and Sarah) name their sons after James Robinson? - James Robinson Davis and James Robinson Campbell. From letter #1 - "Sister Sally [Davis] . . She has also a son who they call James Robinson after yourself."

In his August 1815 letter, Jacob Van Lear mentions the death of Aunt Robinson. Is this the same as Gertrude Van Lear Robinson? She is the likely sister of Jacob Van Lear's father, Jacob Van Lear Sr. I record her death as Feb 1816.

Is the correct date for letter #3 in 1829, or 1839? 1829 seems more likely to be correct.

Can we track George Robinson, son of James Robinson? There is a George Robinson identified as postmaster at Greenville, Wayne county Missouri in 1828. His father identifies him as postmaster in Ste Genevieve county Missouri in 1829.

Can we track "Vail" Robinson, son of James Robinson? Where did the name Vail K Robinson come from? A check of early doctors in Vicksburg Mississippi identifies a Dr Thomas Anderson, but no Dr Robinson. Also, no likely Robinson candidates in the 1830 census of Warren county Mississippi.

In letter #3, James Robinson may be teaching school. His sons are both doctors. Does this suggest anything about their education?

Miss Mary Henderson is mentioned in letter #3. The Henderson name is regularly seen in letters between Jacob Van Lear and his likely brother-in-law James Tate.

Captain William Shields is a mutual friend of Robinson and Van Lear. (mentioned in letter #3). He is probably the William Shields who married Mary Thompson in Augusta county Virginia, and removed near Caledonia in Washington county Missouri about 1826-1828.

Missouri neighbor, W Thomas, returns for a visit to Augusta county Virginia. (mentioned in letter #3).

There are three James Robinsons in the 1830 census of Washington county Missouri. Two can be identified. Is this third one the James Robinson of the letters? No wife appears in this census record.
1830 Census of Washington county Missouri, Belleview, page 98
James Robinson; 0000001 (age 40-50); living alone, 4 slaves