

Letter written by Peter Hastie to his relatives, New York, 12 May 1841 (NLS shelfmark:

Acc. 12249/6)

This is the last surviving letter from Peter Hastie in the National Library of Scotland's collections. He describes his position as resident engineer on the Croton Aqueduct project, and sums up how he feels about his new career.

Transcript

Water Commissioners office

New York 12th May 1841

My dear Sir

You have, most likely, by this time given up all hope of hearing from me again. You have but too much cause for such a conclusion. You know my habits and failings in this respect; and will attribute my long silence to the right cause.

Your last letter I have not now by me; and I do not remember with certainty the date of it. I have heard nothing definite of you, or my other relatives near you, for a long time; and of late, conscience has accused me sharply of neglect of you all. I embrace the opportunity of a friend (Mr Dewar) visiting our native land just to write a few lines, for I cant do more, just to say where I am and what I have been doing of late years. – You are aware that in the spring of 1837, I left the service of the State of New York; along with my friend John B. Jervis, and entered into that of the City of New York; he as Chief and I as one of the Resident engineers, of the Croton Aqueduct

in which employment I have continued ever since: as full of business as I could well be. The Aqueduct is upwards of forty miles long, and is divided into 4 Residencies, or divisions, mine being the 4th or that next the City, embracing by far the heaviest and most important part of the work. This, of course, I esteem an honour.

My situation in a wordly point of view, is, on the whole, a good one: The emolument is not great, but it is enough for all my wants: The engineers, my associates; Chief and assistants, are better men than I can reasonably hope to be again employed with. I am not without difficulties to contend with; these are met with in every situation in this life, and perhaps mine may be of less magnitude than I at present think them. Could I be assured

of being as well off, for the rest of my days, as I am now perhaps I should say, "agreed"; I am content.

The communication between Britain and America is now by means of Steam Ships, frequent and rapid: There is therefore no reason except my procrastinating habits, why I dont let you hear from me, as frequently as you might

wish. I have now attained to the age of nearly 36 years; more than half the natural life of man; and perhaps in future, I may be more regular in my correspondence, than I have hitherto been. My health is good. Since I entered on the Croton Aqueduct I have not been one day off duty because of sickness, nor indeed for any other cause. I have at least the right of claiming some little credit for sticking closely to my business: indeed much of my neglect in letter writing is to be attributed to this cause.

I feel anxious to hear of my Uncle James: whether his original success in his School still continues. I do not forget my Aunts Margaret & Jane nor even Uncle "Nezer". How are all their families? I have again, my dear Sir, to beg the favour of you to let me hear from you once more.

With best wishes to you and my aunt and to all other friends; I remain
Still yours affectionately

P. Hastie