

The Lucy Thompson Lisk Letter

with notations by Eric Christensen

This transcription of the letter from Lucy Thompson Lisk to her Aunt Harriet Metcalf comes from *“Give It All Up and Follow Your Lord”*: *Mormon Female Religiosity, 1831–1843* (A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of History, Brigham Young University, June 2001, by Janiece Lyn Johnson), which can be accessed at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5833&context=etd>. The original letter is said to be in private possession, with a photocopy at the LDS Church History Library.

I have included notations to try to identify every person mentioned in the letter. Each mention of someone in the letter is indicated by formatting their name in **bold blue type highlighted in gray**. Following the initial mention of each person is a notation describing their relationship to the family **highlighted in yellow** with each name in **bold red type**.

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Hounsfield, New York April 28, 1840

The author of this letter was **Lucy Thompson Lisk**, the daughter of **Andrew Lisk** (mentioned later in this letter), who was probably the son of **William Lisk**.

My Dear **Aunt**

The recipient of this letter was **Lucy Thompson Lisk**'s aunt **Harriet Metcalf**, the sister of **Alfred Randolph Metcalf** (mentioned later in this letter), who was the father of **Helen Octavia Metcalf**, who was the wife of **Ora M. Lisk** (mentioned later in this letter as **Orra**), who was the brother of **Lucy Thompson Lisk**.

We have waited rather impatiently some time for an answer to our letter written in February but have gotten none as yet. I believe I promised to write again as soon as we should get another letter from you, but I want to tell you what we have all been about since we wrote and I guess I will not wait any longer for a letter from you. When we sent you our last letter **Olivia** I believe was very sick but she got some better so that she walked about the house and did some light chores. but the doctor said her complaint was on her nerves and that she would not be able to do any work this summer. and we finally got discouraged as well as she for the medicine appeared to take no effect. and she appeared to be failing rather than gaining and she said if I must die I must and dont make me take any more medicine for it does me no good. so she left it off and appeared to do as well without it. I had not got able to do anything more than to set the table or help **Mother** wash the dishes and she had all the work to do and us to wait on besides.

The **Olivia** mentioned here was **Olivia Elizabeth “Olive” Lisk**, the sister of **Lucy Thompson Lisk**.

The **Mother** mentioned here was **Nancy Phelps**, the mother of **Lucy Thompson Lisk**.

But about the last of February, **Elijah** and **Elvira** came to see us and wanted me to go home with them and **mother** said we heard that our cousin **Briggs Alden** was coming to our house the next day in that character of a Mormon Elder. you may guess our astonishment and curiosity at such news. it is true. we had heard that **Uncle Alden**'s folks had joined the Mormons about three years before, but we had heard again that they has left them. but we could get no certain information concerning them so you may imagine that we felt some desire to know something about them as well as their doctrine. But as I had promised to go [to] **Elvira**, we departed telling **Mother** if the morman wanted to see us before we come back he must come where we were.

The **Elijah** and **Elvira** mentioned here were **Elijah Fields Randall** and his wife **Nancy Elvira Lisk**, the sister of **Lucy Thompson Lisk**.

The **Briggs Alden** mentioned here was the son of **Sarah Lisk**, who was probably the daughter of **William Lisk**.

The **Uncle Alden** mentioned here was **William Mullins Alden**, the father of **Briggs Alden**.

but the snow went off next day and I had to stay a fortnight during which we heard nothing from home or the Mormon. and when there came a little snow **Elijah** brought me home and our folks said that **B[riggs] A[lden]** had preached here twice and that he had then gone out to **uncle Bradfords** but that he was coming back and would preach at our school house that evening.

The **uncle Bradford** mentioned here was **Bradford Lisk**, probably the son of **William Lisk**.

They said he preached nothing but truth. but I told them I should not take their word for it but go and hear for myself. and would you believe that when I came to hear him I was just fool enough to believe what he said because it was in the Bible. when we got home **Mother** asked me how I liked Mormonism? I replied, I have no fault to find with what I have heard. she then said **Lucy** you may depend upon it they preach the truth. I told her I had not heard enough to judge whether it was all truth or not. **Briggs** came home with us and preached at our house the next evening. but I was taken more unwell than usual and could not sit up so I laid down and got to sleep and left my part of the meeting. but he staid with us the next day and I had some opportunity of conversing with him and the more I heard the more fully was I convinced of the truth of the doctrine.

Mother had by this time concluded to obey the gospel and be baptized. but as **Olivia** and I were somewhat fearful and unbelieving, she concluded that she would wait until we would go with her as **Elder Alden** had got to leave us for a few days. He went away on Thursday and on Monday **mother** was taken sick with the canker rash and **Olivia** and I were scarcely able to take care of her. and we couldnt get anyone to help us as there were many sick around us. so we did the best we could and she got better in a few days, but as she got better **Olivia** grew worse. but we found a good smart girl to come and help us.

Olivia was taken with the canker rash on Sunday night and **Maria** came to work on Monday and worked two days and then she was taken sick. she complained of her throat being sore and filled up but was in hopes she should be better and would not let her folks know that she was sick. so **mother** gave her some pills, three of which were a dose but she took twenty and they had no effect. and she grew worse all the time and we thought she would die so we sent for the doctor Wednesday night about midnight. When he came he said she had got the canker rash. her throat was so sore she could scarcely swallow any thing. and he told us to give her 3 more pills which would in all probability help her. **Olivia** had taken some which operated but she would not take anything more. their throats were very sore so he put on some liniment which blistered **Olivia's** in less than ten minutes but **Maria** tore hers off. the doctor said if they did not get along then we must let him know it so he went away.

The **Maria** mentioned here was probably an unrelated person who came to work in the house. *[It could be suggested that she may have been **Maria King**, the first wife of **Briggs Alden**, but that is probably unlikely since it says she would not let "her folks" (I assume in reference to her parents) know that she was sick. **Maria King Alden's** exact death date is uncertain, and she may have died before this time.]*

Well **Olivia** did not get any better and **Maria** grew worse. her medicine had taken no effect and her throat grew worse and she grew sick at her stomach and on Friday we sent for the doctor again. he came in the evening but she was then so sick she could not stir without puking and her heart beat very violently. He said he would give her something to turn her from her sickness but it did not have any effect and he said her phisick must operate before she would get any better. her throat had got so full she could not take more pills. so he gave **Mother** some croton oil and told her to rub it on her and she did. and he said it would probably operate in less

than ten minutes. but he waited an hour and then gave her one drop to take and left something to check its operation. if it should prove too powerful and then went home saying if she does not get better let me know it.

Well I sat up with her that night and **Mother** slept with **Olivia** and took care of her. and I gave **Maria** her medicine as the Dr directed but to my astonishment and alarm it had no more effect than so much water. and she grew sicker and weaker and was still worse in the morning. we still did all we could but could not help her and after noon **Orra** went after the doctor again and he came and **Briggs** came back while **Orra** was gone after him.

The **Orra** mentioned here was **Ora M. Lisk** (mentioned earlier in the note about **Harriet Metcalf**).

The doctor gave **M[aria]** about twelve more drops of croton oil besides rubbing more on her then left her something for her mouth and throat and told us what to give her when. the oil operated for nourishment for then she had not taken as much as half a teacupful of any thing in four days and puked all the time most every thing she did take.

Olivia's throat was a little better only the blister, but she grew weaker all the time. the doctor told her she must keep as still and quiet as possible but did not give us any Encouragement to think she would ever get well. but she said she might be better so he left her some medicine and went away saying let me know if they dont get along. After he was gone **Briggs** said to **Olivia**, it is your priveledge to be heald if you desire it. and she replied that it was her desire but medicine could not do it and she would take no more. He said the gifts of prophecy healing and tongues were in the church of Latter Day Sints the same that they were in former times. and that if she would lay his hands upon her and pray with and for her which he did and it was about nine o clock in the evening.

she had sat up most all day in the rocking chair with pillows abourd her but was not able to walk about the room till about ten o'clock. she arose and undressed herself alone which she had not done for a more than a week. and went to bed saying with a smile, I shall get up and get breakfast for you tomorrow morning. but we could not believe it possible. And would you believe that when I awoke the next morning she was running up the cellar stairs with a panfull of potatoes in her hand, but thank god it was so. But I found poor **Maria** no better. she had not had anything pass her bowels in almost a fortnight. and we could not get any medicine to operate at all and it seemed as though she must die. but she said, I believe I may be healed as well as **Olivia** and he co[m]plied with her request. But still to our surprise her medicine took no efect & the canker in her throat had spread even to her stomach. she would not take any medicine so we threw hers and **Olivias** out the window. In the afternoon she was better and Monday she sat up most all day. in the two days she went to work well and smart and has worked ever since. but she did not have anything to pass her bowels till the next week which rather puzzles the doctors. she was with us two weeks and then went home.

While **Maria** was sitting up Monday, **Mother** and **Olivia** and myself went and were baptized having been fully convinced of the truth of the doctrine which we have embraced and are determined to prove faithful to the end.

The next Saturday **Olivia** went out and took cold which brought on a swelling in her throat that by Sunday noon threatened every moment to choke her to death so rapid was its progress. She could not even swallow a teaspoonful of water though she was very hungry. there was preaching here in the afternoon and we were to be confirmed but the elders did not get here till the congregation had collected so they waited till after the service was over. and we were confirmed members of the church of Latter day Saints.

they then prayed with **Olivia** for the restoration of her health and their prayer was granted and she is now a well hearty girl and has been ever since.

Since then **Olivia** has been baptized and confirmed a member of the church and we believe others will yet do the same. **Father** does not appear in the least inclined to oppose us but we

meet with opposition enough from other quarters I will assure you. but may the Lord have mercy on them and open their eyes. **Fathers** health is not good this spring as usual but he rather gains as the weather grows warmer. **Mother** says tell them I am well in soul and body and if there comes any of these poor despised Mormons there receive them in the name of the Lord and God will bless you for it. **Olivia** says tell **Aunt Harriet** if she will answer this letter I will write her one by myself.

The **Father** mentioned here was **Andrew Lisk** (mentioned earlier in the note about **Harriet Metcalf**).

(It was just night that they prayed with **Olivia** and in a little while she called to me to bring her some porridge which I did. and she drank it and soon got up and ate a hearty supper and sat up all the evening. but she had not been able to raise her head from the pillow or speak aloud in all the afternoon.)

But I dont believe you will <want> another as long as this very soon or at least till you have read this. Well the way to take revenge is to write one three times as long just as quick as you can. **Elvira** and **Angelina** are well and their families. I must now bid you good bye as I have filled my paper. **Father Mother** and all send their love to you and to **GrandFather** and **Mother** and **Uncle Randolph** and **Aunt Octavia**.

The **Angelina** mentioned here was **Angelina Antoinette Lisk**, the sister of **Lucy Thompson Lisk**.

The **GrandFather** and **Mother** mentioned here were **Joel Metcalf** and **Mehitable Spencer**, the parents of **Alfred Randolph Metcalf**. [*Mehitable Spencer was also the maternal grandmother of Lucy Thompson Lisk. Lucy's mother, Nancy Phelps, was born to Aholiab Phelps and Mehitable Spencer prior to Mehitable's second marriage to Joel Metcalf.*]

The **Uncle Randolph** mentioned here was **Alfred Randolph Metcalf** (mentioned earlier in the note about **Harriet Metcalf**).

The **Aunt Octavia** mentioned here was **Octavia** (maiden name unknown) **Metcalf**, the wife of **Alfred Randolph Metcalf**.

Give my love to them all. I have not written half I wanted to and perhaps you will think I have been more particular than interesting—but I feel as though I wanted you to know all that I know. and if you wish to know what true enjoyment is—become a Mormon. Yes, come out and be separated from sinners and sin. take the path the Saviour trod, though it may be a thorny one. I believe you will find many sweet flowers. also search the scriptures carefully and prayerfully and see if these things are not so. and that God may bless you and lead you into all truth is the prayer of you affectionate niece.

Lucy T Lisk

To **Miss Harriet Metcalf**

Constantine St. Joseph Co.

Michigan

You must not give credit to the silly and rediculous stories you hear. but look to God and he will not deceive you. if you put your trust in him he will hold you up and never forsake you.

Lucy T Lisk