"A dear dear friend": Six Letters from Deborah Norris to Sarah Wister, 1778-1779

(1) I could not expect, that I was so much lov'd; and yet I find it more, and more pleasing to think that I am so.

(2) Thee has indeed no reason to fear a rival in my Heart. Love me as I love thee and then thee will love me with the sincerest, the warmest affection, that it is possible for one to love a dear dear friend with. . . . Adeiu! I wish you ev'ry happiness, and comfort. and am thy sincerly affectionate friend. thine with increasing tenderness [.] 

(3) . . . the heart of Ardelia is dilated with the purest sentiments of friendship, tenderness, and affection for thee.—

(4) . . . our sacred our inviolable friendship [.] 

So wrote the Philadelphia Quaker Deborah Norris (Ardelia)¹ to her close friend Sarah Wister when both were aged sixteen.² Another letter dated February 1779 elaborated, "'Sure our Souls are cogenial.' the long acquaintance that I have had with you makes you inexpressibly dear to me, I shall never cultivate any new friendship comparable with that heart felt one's I entertain for you—it is no common attachment, but a harmony a cement of soul that binds our union [.]"³ An examination of other letters written by young Quaker women in the late eighteenth century reveals a similar preoccupation with friendship.⁴ J. William Frost's The Quaker Family in Colonial America points out, "The letters written by Debby Norris, Peggy Rawle, and Sally Wister show the normal adolescent wish to find a friend to whom all can be confided."⁵ But although most Quaker girls valued friendship, it is

¹ Ardelia was the pen name Deborah Norris used in corresponding with her girl friends.
² In Sally Wister Papers, Correspondence 1777-1779, owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and reproduced with their permission.
³ Deborah Norris to Sally Wister, February 27, 1779, in the Eastwick Collection of the American Philosophical Society and reproduced with their permission. Although the letter was published as an appendix in Albert Cook Myers, ed., Sally Wister's Journal (Philadelphia, 1903), I quote from the original owing to Myers' editorial inaccuracy.
obvious from the following collection of six letters that Deborah Norris took her friendships—and their betrayals—particularly seriously. In the fourth letter, for instance, she told Sally how their mutual friend Mary Pleasants, newly married and become Mrs. Logan, had cooled, "this is a strange world! friendships are made and bound in it, dissolved and pass away like the basest fabric of a vision leaving no traces of a wreck behind and yet it is so common that the generallity of mankind seldom bestow a thought on it." The theme of friendship therefore dominates the six letters.

Age, social status, religion, education, and temperament all bound Deborah Norris and Sarah Wister in close friendship. Both were born in 1761 to wealthy Quaker merchant families. Debby Norris, the only daughter of Charles Norris and his second wife, Mary Parker, was only five when her father died. She lived with her widowed mother and three brothers in the Norris mansion on Chestnut Street. Sally Wister came from Welsh and German stock and was the eldest of Lowry Jones' and Daniel Wister's seven surviving children. The Wister family spent summers at their country mansion in Germantown and winters at their town house in Philadelphia, except during the British occupation of the city in 1777 when (unlike the Norrises, who stayed in Philadelphia) they fled to Gwynedd, North Wales, for ten months. There Sally wrote most of her well known Journal, which she addressed to Debby. The two girls apparently became friends at Anthony Benezet's Quaker school for girls. Sally's journal entry for January 4, 1780 referred to "a frendship which commenc'd at school" and Debby's letter to Sally dated February 27, 1779 mused "I sometimes take a retrospective veiw of the happy day's of our childhood 'our schoolday friendship' and alway's recall the idea with pleasure." And well she might, for Schoolmaster Benezet not only provided an academic curriculum of reading, spelling, writing, grammar, geography, history,

6 Biographical information in the following paragraph is from Myers, 9-13 and John W Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania Genealogical and Personal Memoirs (New York, 1948), I, 264-66
7 The Journal's published portions extend from September 1777 to June 1778. However, in the manuscript (owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania), the entries extend to May 1780. A second, unpublished, journal in the Eastwick Collection of the American Philosophical Society continues the entries beyond 1780, though in much fragmented form. Quotations are from the original manuscript of the earlier journal.
8 The Journal of Sally Wister, and Deborah Norris to Sally Wister, February 27, 1779
and arithmetic, but also allowed occasional recreation and physical exercise—leisure time which perhaps helped foster such friendships.\(^9\) Indeed, at the age of 64, by then a grande dame of Philadelphia society, Deborah Norris Logan still recalled Benezet’s untraditional curriculum and encouragement of holistic education.\(^10\)

Temperamentally, too, Debby and Sarah were so close they felt free to exchange intimate information. Debby’s letters to Sally and Sally’s Journal to Debby reveal two lively, intelligent, perceptive, articulate and precocious adolescents. In her letters Debby naturally included the topics that Sally valued most—family, mutual friends, beaux and social activities—and excluded or downplayed political and historical events unless they had personal relevance. But in addition to gossip and personal anecdotes the correspondence possessed a more serious side: it developed the friendship by sharing self-doubts, admitting inadequacies, and explaining misunderstandings. The friendship, as Sally noted in her journal, seemed “founded on an immoveable basis.”

It was not. On January 4, 1780, only five months after the last letter in this collection, Sally wrote in her journal:

> ...the friend to whom my journal was wrote has violated a friendship which commenc’d at school and till about two weeks ago was productive of infinite satisfaction to both of us, but it is with pleasure I can lay my hand on my heart and say I am entirely innocent, of ever offending her. I vainly imagin’d that our intimacy was founded on an immoveable basis I was deceiv’d, but it will teach me not to place too much dependance on the friendship and proffessions of this world. . . .

Unfortunately no corresponding letter provides Debby’s viewpoint or explains reasons for the estrangement. However, it may be connected with the cooling of another friendship between Debby and Susannah, Ann, and Sally Jones, Sally Wister’s aunts, but so close in age they were mutual friends of Debby and Sally. A poignant letter from Debby to her friend Sally Fisher of Duck Creek, Delaware, alluded to her

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previous intimacy with the Jones sisters and may extend to Sally Wister too:

...I well remember, that I could not be said to perfectly relish any parties where the J.s were excluded their society seemed in a manner nessessary to my happiness, And yet their behaviour has some how estranged them from my mind in a way unaccountable to me, I am not very intimate with any Girls here, now; 'tho I have a large Acquaintance, I cannot easily form New friendships.¹¹

When Debby referred to the affair in other letters, however, nostalgia gave way to anger.¹² The break between Deborah and Sarah marked an important turning point in their lives: the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. Although they possessed many common experiences, their lives diverged when their friendship dissolved; the more Deborah's life turned outward, the more Sarah's turned inward.

Deborah Norris's later biography is well known so only a brief review is necessary here. Even though she teasingly confided to Sally Fisher of Duck Creek on May 6, 1780, "it seems to me that we shall neither of us marry; but for reasons rather differant, thee from not having an offer thee approves, I, from having no offers to disapprove," Deborah married Dr. George Logan less than a year later in September 1781.¹³ Logan had studied medicine in Scotland, but after his marriage, he and his wife took up residence at Stenton, his ancestral home near Germantown, where he became a gentleman farmer, politician, and family man, and she became a mother, hostess, and historian. Deborah Norris Logan brought up three sons (Albanus, Gustavus and Algernon), supported her husband as Republican politician and U.S. Senator (1801-1807), entertained distinguished visitors attracted to Philadelphia as the new nation's cultural and political center, became a conscientious chronicler of Pennsylvania history, and kept a journal from 1815 until her death in 1839.¹⁴ She was both part and product of the

American Revolution, for although she retained the domestic orientation of a pre-Revolutionary woman, she also cultivated the relative political and intellectual freedom of a post-Revolutionary one.\textsuperscript{15}

Though historians know a great deal about most phases of Deborah Norris Logan’s life, they know comparatively little about Sarah Wister’s adult life, and this forms the first of many contrasts between the two women. Unlike Deborah, Sarah did not marry (neither did her two younger sisters, Elizabeth and Hannah, nor her youngest brother, William). That four of seven siblings remained unmarried was not unheard of in early Quaker families where, according to Robert V. Wells’ study of children alive at 50, 12 percent of the sons and 16 percent of the daughters never married.\textsuperscript{16} In addition, J. William Frost notes that the number of unwed Quakers “increased in the late eighteenth century and may be far higher than ten percent.”\textsuperscript{17}

As an adult Sarah took on three commitments that reduced her social sphere but emphasized her personal one: expanding her knowledge through extensive reading and writing, developing her religious sensibility, and caring for her invalid mother. Her letters and journals amply illustrate her interest in history, philosophy and theology and include references to John Locke, a biography of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Hannah More’s \textit{Considerations on Religion and Public Education} (1793), Thomas Ellwood’s \textit{Sacred History} (1705), a work by Eusebius, and volume four of Erasmus Middleton’s \textit{Evangelical Biography} (1776-86) (which she borrowed from her friend and physician, Benjamin Rush). More and more, in true Quaker fashion, she valued intellectual and social activity as a manifestation of moral and religious development, and she distrusted literature that served as entertainment rather than instruction. For example, in an undated letter to her friend Rebecca Bullock, Sarah quoted “Observations of the Prince of Conti” to persuade Rebecca that non-representational reading was dangerous: “‘Plays and romances not only indispose the soul for all acts of religion and piety, but they give it a disgust, in some measure to all serious and ordinary actions.’”\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] See Premo, 101
\item[17] Frost, note, 168.
\item[18] Sarah Wister to Rebecca Bullock, n.d. (American Philosophical Society)
\end{footnotes}
Sarah not only corresponded regularly with family and friends but also wrote poetry, sometimes under her *nom de plume* Laura. Some of it was frivolous like this nonsense letter penned in 1794 to her brother John who had left Germantown for Philadelphia: “Since last equip’d in trailing state,/Thee left thy fathers friendly gate,/Resign’d thy homesteads, simple joys—/For City business toil and noise,/Not much has pass’d in that short time,/That I can dress in polish’d rhyme.” But some of it was serious, “Evening Written at That Season, July 30th 1792,” “Evening Written under the Pressure of Painful Thoughts” and “The Sigh,” for example. In his edition of Sarah’s Revolutionary Journal, Albert Cook Myers stated that some of this poetry appeared in the Philadelphia *Port Folio*, but his claim has not been verified.

As a girl Sarah displayed the same interest (which was relatively little) in religious matters as any other young Quaker, but as an adult she became extremely pious. The best examples of her religious awareness lie in an unpublished devotional journal she kept from June 1796 to May 1797, which was mainly therapeutic and undoubtedly private. It did not therefore possess the characteristics of a Quaker spiritual autobiography like John Woolman’s, since it was private (not public), unrevised (not carefully edited), and structured erratically in daily, weekly, or monthly entries (not structured according to a set pattern of spiritual growth from childhood ignorance to adolescent reflection and finally to adult conflict and conversion). The following extracts convey in detail the spiritual turbulence of an eighteenth-century Quaker woman:

[August 5, 1796] “That a Christian life is a continual warfare, I cannot doubt[.]”

[August 23, 1796] “A great evil hath been committed in my native City—the public preaching of the Unitarian doctrines[.]”

[August 29, 1796] “I see a decaying World around, me, and sometimes feel its unsubstantiality. O that this feeling might be deepen’d, until, I come diligently to seek and serve Thee, Thou only enduring good.”

[October 3, 1796] “O my treachrous heart and my powerful adversary[.]”

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20 Myers, 40. We do know, however, that Elizabeth Wister published poetry in the *Port Folio*; see Randolph C. Randall, “Authors of the *Port Folio* Revealed by the Hall Files,” *American Literature*, 11 (1940), 413.
[November 1796] 'My coldness of heart has of late been great, what is it owing to? Oh that I may daily while life is mercifully vouchsav'd, seek, to fall on that Stone, by which we are broken.'"

[May 15, 1797] "The happiest bonds of relationship, have little estimation in my view, compar'd with the love and favor of God [.]." 21

Sarah refers many times to Christian life in terms of warfare, and her particular struggle was between faith and despair. Good Quaker that she tried to be, Sarah documented her self-scrutiny and soul-searching as she strove for perfection but constantly succumbed to self-doubt. Historian Terri Premo writes of Deborah Norris Logan's old age that "As a devout Quaker, Deborah had struggled to achieve that state of serenity where, removed from worldly concerns, she would be prepared to enter God's kingdom. During times of great trial, as well as during her quiet, reflective moments, Deborah searched for consolation and perspective from the sense of resignation which she cultivated." 22

Without the pressures of wifehood and motherhood Sarah Wister strove for serenity at an earlier age yet found the struggle equally difficult.

Reading and writing turned Sarah mentally inward; piety turned her spiritually inward; and devotion to her mother turned her socially inward. While Quaker children were bound to their parents by filial duty, Sarah Wister went beyond duty to loving devotion, both physician and emotional. For example, as her mother became old and infirm, Sarah arranged doctors' visits and carefully noted specific symptoms. This extract from a letter to the family physician, Benjamin Rush, provides an interesting insight into eighteenth-century medical treatment and terminology:

It is with great satisfaction I can inform Doctor Rush, that the complaints which my dear mother labour'd under, are (except one) in degree reliev'd agreeably to thy advice she had last night two ingections. . . . her flushes of heat have been less frequent this day, but not experiencing the state of her pulse materially chang'd, she was blooded this afternoon, the stricture on the bladder has return'd this evening very painfully: the tenesmus and the bowel complaint are greatly alleviated. 23

21 Devotional journal of Sarah Wister (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).
22 Premo, 98.
23 Sarah Wister to Dr. Rush, August 8, 1795 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).
Wister's emotional ties to her mother appeared particularly strong, as this verse apology, written when she was twenty-nine, shows. Entitled "To My Beloved Mother," the poem ends with these stanzas: "But can repentance most sincere/My dearest mothers pardon prove/Can she her Sarahs faults forgive/And bless her with her wonted Love?/ Assur'd that no ungracious look./Or word, that from my lips doth steal,/But fills with keen regret my heart/And sorrow, and remorse I feel." It is hard to imagine what transgression could prompt such an abject apology except that, since Sally had dedicated her life to God, any fault assumed religious as well as social and emotional overtones. Lowry Wister died in February 1804; overcome by shock, Sarah died only two months later on April 25, 1804, aged 43.

As teenagers Deborah and Sarah shared similar outlooks and experiences, but as adults their common ground dissolved and, even had they still been friends, they might have found it hard to reconcile the different orientations of their lives. The collection of six letters is valuable in personal terms for recording the last stages of a friendship before it disintegrated; however, the collection is also valuable for its contribution to women's history at a time of great social and political upheaval. What does it suggest about a female adolescent sensibility in traumatic times?

First, as already noted, the personal theme of friendship dominated these letters, not the public theme of war. Clearly the emphasis was deliberate. In letter one Debby wrote that she feared for the Wister family so vulnerably placed just outside Philadelphia, then added, "I dare not say on this subject, what my heart is full off—tho it is altogether private." She decided to omit such sensitive political information in case the letter fell into a stranger's hands, yet she admitted to a more mundane reason for hoping the letter arrived safely: she was embarrassed by the poor handwriting, colloquial style and confidential confessions. Psychologically Deborah displayed her anxiety about the political situation with her security in the friendship, and replaced the disharmony of war with the harmony of intimacy.

Deborah also reduced the macrocosmic to the microcosmic, stressing the immediate significance and personal relevance of general events. For instance, she particularized the situation of some Quakers imprisoned for pacifism by mentioning Sally Wister's grandmother, who

24 [Sarah Wister to Lowry Wister], September 14, 1790 (American Philosophical Society)
petitioned Congress to release her son (see note 36). Elsewhere the letters alluded to Continental officers in terms of their romantic potential not their war exploits, as the beginning of letter three shows, "And so my dear Sally I have found out who this Regimental Beau who I mentioned in my chester letter, is, . . . on enquiry I learned he was a colonel Fitzjarrel, late one of Gen. Washington's aid de camp's, he has lately resign'd, and was on his way to Virginia when we met him, and so much for the Colonel."

Third, the female sensibility in this correspondence emphasized continuity and normalcy in the face of widespread disruption. Deborah unconsciously conformed to a feminine stereotype because she maintained her equilibrium with rounds of social calls, country excursions, churchgoing, letter writing, parties, teas, tete a tete's, and so on. In letter two, for example, she admitted she would rather ignore politics and note social events: "as to Politicks they are not our province, I am very moderate, all my wishes tending to Peace,. . . I wish'd to say all my heart was full off. . .[the] many little adventures. . .such as we used to communicate to each other, every time we met [. . .]"

Fourth, the female sensibility in the letters was on the point of adulthood, almost ready to adopt a sexual identity and role. Deborah considered her "awakening" so important that she gave it precedence over national affairs, but her responses at this time in her life were understandably inconsistent: sometimes she showed poise and maturity and other times awkwardness and immaturity. So in the same letter she could say with sophisticated aplomb that men "think they have a right to high and sovereign command, over not only the, Fowl's of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field, but likewise over us poor Ladies, who I think equal if not superior Qualities with themselves" and then revert to adolescent silliness, "we have not forgot, our old fashion of pinching, when any thing remarkable occurs. and we cannot conveniently speak, if I walk, next to S Jones—and I happen to get a bow, at the same moment, I receive a smart pinch which often occasions me to return it—". It is worth noting, however, that this was an old habit between the girls which presumably would disappear when they felt more at ease with the opposite sex. The correspondence also shows Deborah's awareness of her transition from girlhood to womanhood. In letter one, for example, she admitted, "I have never yet been dress'd up," but in letter six, written sixteen months later, she told Sally "I was
dressd in my new suite of blue mantua, and to confess the truth took more pains than common with regard to my appearance [...] Put simply, Deborah grew up from 1778 to 1779. Her references to the recently married Maria Pleasants Logan indicate that she fully realized the next phase of her sexual development: becoming a wife and mother.

The theme of friendship pervades Deborah Norris's letters; the author constantly reduced the general to the specific; she emphasized continuity to defend herself against discontinuity; and she sensed her nascent sexuality. The fifth indication of female sensibility does not concern subject matter as much as structure and style. To complement her subjective content Deborah wrote colloquially in rambling sentences. Her method was associative and immediate, for Sally knew her well enough to follow a letter's twists and turns when Debby got sidetracked by long anecdotes, interrupted her narrative flow with interpretations of her own and others' behavior, or broke off letter writing to run an errand. In the fifth letter, Deborah described her dress for meeting, recounted the afternoon's activities, recalled a romantic dream, rebuked her friend Sally Jones for flirting and fishing for compliments, fretted over a cancelled outing, and transmitted family news. Obviously this correspondence could not possibly convey face-to-face communication, but the content, structure, and style provided a fair approximation of what the girl's said and how they said it when they actually met.

Three historians claim, "Relatively few women have left diaries, letters, and other written sources with which to assess their role and their experience. The very existence of written materials on a woman tells us that she was exceptional: she had the leisure and ability to write, she had the opportunity to experience something other than basic production for her household, and she lived in a family conscious enough of its heritage to preserve family records." Therefore, a set of letters documenting an adolescent girl's sensibility becomes especially valuable.

The last word belongs to Deborah Norris Logan herself. Long after Sarah Wister died, Sarah's brother Charles allowed Deborah to read the journal Sally had addressed to her. Apparently this was the first time she

saw it; overcome, she returned it to Charles with this note:

D:L: returns the manuscript which he kindly lent her some time ago, and which has, together with the memory of the beloved writer, brought vividly to her mind days long since past; . . .
Stenton, May 24th [18]30.26

In transposing these letters from the manuscripts I have retained original spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Deborah’s style is so clear and conversational that even where modern spelling or punctuation differs from eighteenth-century conventions, the letters are still easy to follow. I have identified people and places where possible.

LETTER ONE

Ardelia [Deborah Norris], Philadelphia, to
Sarah Wister, North Wales

[Early April 1778]

“Tho thee, my dear Girl, says thee has clos’d, the subject,27 the beginning of thy last, was apon, Yet I must venture to unseal it, for a few moments however, and then if thee desires it, it shall be buried in Oblivion thee askes me how I “can imagine (who have known thee so long, and so well, that the amiable P F28 posses’s, the greatest share of thy affections,”)? It, was my dear, the knowledge, of her good qualities, and my own inferiority that made me think so. but I have no reason to be dissatisfied, with myself for making this enquiry, as it has produced an Eclarissment, so much to my satisfaction, I could not expect, that I was so much lovd; and yet I find it more, and more pleasing to think that I am so, and now give me leave to desire an explanation of one thing; why would thee rather if one must be preferd, before thee, in my unworthy

26 Quoted in Myers, 7.
27 From the context of this letter, Debby previously suggested that Sally preferred P F (Polly Fishbourne), and Sally replied by asking how Debby could possibly imagine she preferred Polly. Debby’s decision in this letter to “unseal” the topic presumably constitutes the third written attempt to clear up the issue.
28 Mary (Polly) Fishbourne (1760-1842) was a close friend of both Debby Norris and Sally Wister. In 1787, she married the distinguished Quaker physician Samuel Powell Griffitts (1759-1826). Myers, 105-06.
heart—that it should be P F rather than our charming Virginian, who I do indeed sincerely love, and admire, but not before thee, who I think intitlled to my unbounded Friendship: for who amongst, all my acquaintance, is mistress of such an agreeable manner, such an easy style, and can write such delighting letters, as my dear, dear, Sally Wister can, do not wrong my sincerity, by saying I compliment—Oh Sally let them, be out of the question, with us, entirely. I agree with thee that P F has good reasons for residing with her sister, who thee knows was always a favourite of mine, I have sent in this pacquet a letter for Polly, which as thee told me, you kept a corrispondance, I will beg thee to send to her. Our frd. S. Jones looks very genteel in her new dress the first time I saw her metamorphosd, was the afternoon I received thy last agreeable letter, her brother brought it to me, and I desired him, to presuade his sister, to come and spend the afternoon with me, she came as she ought to do, very sociably, and we spent, a few hours, with a great deal of satisfaction, together: for my own part I have never yet been dressd up When I am, I doubt not, but she will take her revenge of me, she M P. and myself, are as free and sociable, as possible, sometimes

29 "Our charming Virginian" almost certainly refers to Mary (Maria/Molly) Pleasants of Henrico County, Virginia (1722-1794), half-sister of Robert and Samuel Pleasants (discussed later). In July 1779, Mary married Charles Logan (1754-1794), youngest brother of Debby Norris' future husband, George Logan. Debby's six letters show that although she and Mary had been close, their friendship temporarily cooled after Mary's marriage. Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, 1, 31, Norma C and George L Miller, Pleasants and Allied Families (Privately published, 1980), 8, 9, 55

30 Polly Fishbourne's sister Sarah (1755-1823) married George Emlen (1741-1812) in 1775, and Polly often stayed with the Emlens at their country estate, Whitemarsh, fourteen miles north of Philadelphia. Another guest was George Washington, who made his headquarters there during the Continental Army's encampment in autumn 1777. Sally Wister herself stayed with the Emlens in February 1778, and her journal entry confirms Debby Norris' favorable judgment of Sarah, "I think Sally Emlen one of the most beautiful women I ever seen agreeable, affable, sensible, in the true sense of the words her conversation is so very lively and diverting, that were her personal attractions less than they are she cou'd not fail of being belov'd.” Myers, 32, 75

31 Sarah (Sally) Jones (1760- ), youngest daughter of Owen (1711-1793) and Susannah (Evans) Jones (1719-1801), was technically Sally Wister's aunt. However, their closeness in age made Sally Jones, Sally Wister and Debby Norris close friends. In fact, Sally Wister dedicated her journal to her two confidantes; Sally Jones married Samuel Rutter in 1787. William Wade Hinshaw, Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1938), II 570, John W Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia Genealogical and Personal Memoirs (New York, 1933), 1, 631

32 Mary (Molly) Pleasants.
we have the addition of S. and Nancy Drinkers, company, but no beaus, that we are sure off. Sally Jones thinks J. Parker, is grown a Hermit, she dont admire him, as to agreeable as you used to call him, I have told thee enough of him, my sentiments are not changd, in this respect. his sister is pretty, I hear she has attracted the notice of a Beau, I dont say tis true; her frd. I saw yesterday, with her cousin N Pennington, (who is thought Beautiful) Sally was dressd, very genteely, as she always is, she is I think a fine looking girl, tho not handsome, thee has no idea how Molly Pleasants, is improv'd, evry body remarks it But I do not love her, better than I love thee for all), and now my dear I will say somthing of myself—and how ugly I feel, I am grown so, I think tho I was never a Beauty; I must forfeit all thy commendations about the picture, it was none of my performance, but I will send thee, one of mine when I am next in a drawing humour, but this is but seldom; How I wish this, may reach thee safe, if it does I intreat thee to burn it, and oh if it falls into the hands of any stranger, if he is not dead to the feelings of humanity he will burn it, and never let this monument of folly, rise up against me, I should blush to see it, in any hands but thy own, or to hear that it was read by any eyes, but the partial ones of friendship, but away ye uneasy sensations, let me at least try if I can write better. no tis the same scrawl, and will be no better, whilst this same pen is employ'd How charmingly has thee described, thy visit to P F may thee enjoy many such and Oh! how I wish you may be undisturb'd this summer, but I really fear your situation, will subject you to a great many dangers, so nigh the City. I dare say not say on this subject, what my heart is full

33 Sarah (Sally) (1761-1807) and Ann (Nancy) (1764-1830) Drinker, daughters of the diarist Elizabeth Sandwich Drinker and the staunch Quaker Henry Drinker, were also members of the Norris-Wister social circle. Sally married Jacob Downing and Nancy married John Skyrrn Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia, I, 874, Henry S Drinker, History of the Drinker Family (Privately published, 1961), 25

34 Possibly Joseph Parker ( -1831), 2nd Lt 4th Continental Artillery March 1777-1778 Francis B. Hetman, Historical Registers of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution, April 1775 to December 1783 (Baltimore, 1914, rpt 1932), 425

35 Ann (Nancy) Penington (1760-1791) married Robert Smock She also belonged to the Norris-Wister circle of friends.
off—tho it is altogether private, thy good Gd mother, is gone to solicit the release of her son, I earnestly wish she may succeed, how dreadful have the accounts from those worthy friends been lately, it must be dreadful indeed to their familys, and I have been much affected with it.

we have fine pleasant weather now, the garden begins to resume its beauties, I spend a great deal of my time in it—I am call'd; somebody below wants me who is it but I must dress, before I can go down.

I am again set down, to write, the few moments that I was dressing, my mind was employ'd, in thinking who it could be—I was soon out of suspense, the parlour door was open, and at the window opposite stood S Jones, and Molly Pleasants—they told me they were contemplating the beauties of the grass lot—that the window commands a prospect off, they then informed me, they intended to take a walk, and had called for me, to accompany them; this I readily comply'd with, and a long walk we have had—No adventures my dear, but we did not want for a conversation, thee bore a part in it. I wish I dare tell thee all about our conversations, I am sure they would divert thee, Molly lives at her Aunt H Pembertons, whilst her sister is gone—I suppose thee knows, that she is one of the frds. who are gone to congress.

36 Debby's reference to Sally's "good Gd mother" requires some explanation. On April 5, 1778, Elizabeth Drinker, Mary Pemberton, Mary (Molly) (Pemberton) Pleasants and Susannah Jones—Sally Wister's grandmother—left Philadelphia with a petition for Congress requesting that the "Virginia Exiles" (those Quakers exiled to Winchester, Virginia, in August 1777, including Henry Drinker, James, Israel, and John Pemberton, Samuel Pleasants and —later—Owen Jones, Jr) be released. On April 9, the four women met with Thomas Wharton, Jr., President of the Executive Council and were told by the Council's Secretary, Timothy Matlock, that the Council had decided to release the prisoners the previous day. While most of the Virginia Exiles were imprisoned for loyalty, Owen Jones, Jr, was jailed for different reasons. His father, also called Owen Jones, was suspected of depreciating the Continental currency and a warrant was issued for his arrest. By mistake, Owen Jones, Jr, was arrested but agreed to the banishment to save his father. The exiles returned to Philadelphia on April 30.


37 Hannah (Zane) Pemberton (1727-1795) married John Pemberton in 1766. She was actually the great-aunt by marriage of Mary (Maria/Molly) Pleasants of Henrico County, Virginia. While Mary (Pemberton) Pleasants was petitioning Congress to release her husband, Samuel, her sister-in-law Mary stayed with Hannah Pemberton. A. Dublin, *Old Philadelphia Families* (Philadelphia, 1939), Pleasants family section, 26-27, Leach, 23-27, Miller, 8, 9, 55, Pemberton family genealogy, chart 26 (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).
well my dear is not this a most erudite performance, this letter I mean thee may say with safety, tis the most curious Epistle, I have ever recd. from Ardelia

LETTER TWO

Deborah Norris, Philadelphia, to
Sarah Wister, North Wales

[April 18, 1778]

I will not be always a telling thee what charming letters thee writes and how delighted I am with thy corrispondance, but I will find a little fault with thee, and call thee a most unreasonable Girl, How could thee expect me to send my nonsensical journal when thee did not send thy own "Example goes before precept' suppose (for with thy dear mammy, I have no doubt of its being safe) but suppose some son of Adam, should unfortunatly light upon it, how would his curiosity be gratified, with the perusal of such an uncommon manuscript (by the by I think the sons of Adam, have full as much curiosity in their composition, as any of the daughters of good mother Eve, have) so my dear I will promiss to save it for thee, and continue it, if thee desires me to do so, Thee has indeed no reason to fear a rival in my Heart. Love me as I love thee and then thee will love me with the sincerest, the warmest affection, that it is possible for one to love a dear dear friend with. I think thy discription of the gentleman, who gave rise to Mightily, is very animated, and he must be a very clever person to deserve so bright a character. if he where to know it he would no doubt be mightily pleased. be very careful my dear how thee commends these haughty Lords of the Universe, who think they have a right to high and sovereign command, over not only the, Fowls of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field, but likewise over us poor Ladies, who have I think equal if not superior Qualities with themselves

38 Lowry (Jones) Wister (1742-1804) was the daughter of Owen and Susannah (Evans) Jones. She married Daniel Wister, a Quaker, in 1760, and had seven children: Sarah (Sally) (1761-1804), Elizabeth (Aliza/Betsy) (1764-1812), Hannah (1767-1827), Susannah (Sukey) (1773-1862), John (1776-1862), Charles Jones (1782-1865), and William Wynne (1784-1866). Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, 1, 266
Shall Men the slaves of vice, the tools of art?
Stand public guardians of the female Heart.
With wisdom lead us, or to duty warm?
Improve our morals, or our manners form?
Direct us when to advance, or when retire
The proper fin, the delicate inspire?
Ah specious shew, if justly they condemn
Your error lyes my Sex, in copying them.
Take but their high example for your guide
You sink to ruin, and from virtue Slide
Fall from the Dignity by Heaven assign'd,
The native standard, of the female mind.39

Pardon me this long digression, But I think by thy discription of Mr S.40 he is cleverer than the usual run, of Marylanders, they are generally (if fame says true) Tyranical sort, of Lords and Masters—but I will leave this subject. Thee desires me to write my sentiments freely, this I intend to do, as to Politicks they are not our province, I am very moderate, all my wishes tending to Peace, Inded my dear, I meant nothing more by that sentence in my last that I wishd to say all my heart was full off, than many little adventures, that would appear ridiculous on paper. such as we used to communicate to each other, every time we met, what could thee think I meant? I hope thee reprimanded the Doctor41 for making use of that ugly word, beginning with D. What did he say of me? Who is Miss Burr?42 I beg thee to tell me. Why did thee not send me, the whole of them pretty lines inscribed to P F. who was the author? well now I shall leave off writing, I am agoing to see thy mammy. I have been twice to friend Jones's43 and to my great dis-

39 These lines appear to be by Deborah Norris herself  
40 Mr. S refers to Major William Truman Stoddard (1759-1793), who appears frequently in Sally Wister's journal Born in Maryland and orphaned as a child, Stoddard attended Philadelphia College but left to join the Patriot Army in 1766, where he rose from Ensign to Major He was billeted at Hannah Foulke's farmhouse from October to December 1777, and there he met Sally Wister and her family, who had left Philadelphia. He and Sally engaged in a mild but harmless flirtation Myers, note, 85-90, Heitman, 522  
41 The Doctor refers to Dr. John Foulke (1757-1796), the son of Judah and Mary (Brighburst) Foulke He received his M B degree from the University of the State of Pennsylvania and sailed for France in May 1780 to complete his medical studies. He was apparently a favorite companion of Debby's for these letters mention him favorably several times. Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia, II, 932, Sweeney, 204  
42 The reference cannot be accurately traced.  
43 Friend Jones is Susannah (Evans) Jones, Sally Wister's grandmother.
appointment, have not met thy mammy, however I intend to call again this evening, and am in hopes, she will then be at home—if I see her, she will tell thee, S Jones, intends to write to thee, she, Molly Pleasant, and myself have been taking a walk, this morning, and who does thee think join’d us and walk’d a part of the way with us, why a namesake of ours a Norris tho no relation—he is in the army, Got introduced to our family and has spent an afternoon or two with us, he is sociable, and Polite, (I mention this only, because Sally Jones, declared, she would; and I thought thee would wonder if I was entirely silent on this head. for further particulars, see my journal. when s Jones, read, the little note, enclosed in thy last she snuff’d up her nose. And what a sausy creature, is this Sally Wister, she thinks she has cut me out, well I do[n]t care if she has, said she; we have not forgot, our old fashion of pinching, when any thing remarkable occurs. and we cannot conveniently speak, if I walk, next to S Jones—and I happen to get a bow, at the same moment, I receive a smart pinch which often occasions me to return it—by the next oppertunity, but some times—she is in a better disposition, and then we spare our pinch’es to mutual satisfac[t]ion. If thee was to hear, thy Aunt Patty, talk of your old Beau B N—I am sure thee would be amazed—by her account—indeed by every bodys account.) he is become a perfect—miss I am your most humble servant, is his salutation he enquired of her, when she had heard from Miss Wister? she
told him and that she was well, Miss Jo—you make me quite happy—she is well, how I rejoice Then he calls—S B and N P. I am afraid Patty will be angry at me for writing this should she ever know it. I beg she may not, well I have not done trifling yet, so if thee pleases turn to the other side what a creature would thee make of me, to entertain the least doubt, that I would not read thy journal, Come Come, honestly confess, that thee never entertained a thought, but what I should be rejoiced to read it, as I assure thee I should. Give my love to P F when thee next writes to her, remind her, of writing to me, and to tell me something about your Corrispondance, mammy gives her love to thee, she often enquires about thee, I dreamd the night before last, That thee was in town, and that I was wal[k]ing along fourth Street, with thee, and [tell]ling thee, ev’ry adventure tha[t] had happend, since I Last seen thee, wou[l]d that it] where reality, how tran[sporting] wd. it be! I have again read thy [ch]arming letter, thee desires me [to] tell thee, my sentiments—on past, present, and to come, had thee been a little more particular I could have better complyd, with thy request; I will do it cheerfully, but thee has made the subject, as it now stands, too large, for my silly pen to undertake, I presented thy love to Molly Pleasants, and she thankd me, in thy name for it wishes to be more intimatly acquainted with thee, and often joyns us, in our conversations, about our dear Sally Wister. My talent for writing, is not very bright today. I am ashamed on looking over what I have wrote, mak[e] an excuse to thyself with thy friendly good nature, for every blunder, and as to the writing, Say, poor Debby she has had a very bad pen, when she wrote this This is the truth, it is intollerable, is makes two strokes for one, I can scarce presuade it to go

47 S B refers to Sarah (Sally) Coates Burge (1761-1824), yet another close friend of Debby Norris and Sally Wister. She married the distinguished Philadelphia lawyer William Rawle (1759-1836) in 1783. Myers, 191.

48 N P refers to Ann (Nancy) Pleasants (17??-??) of Hennco County, Virginia. Nancy’s father was Robert Pleasants of Curles (1723-1810), brother of Samuel and Mary (Maria/Molly) Pleasants. Robert Pleasants of Curles had three children mentioned in Debby’s letters—Ann (Nancy), Mary (Polly), and Robert—who regularly stayed in Philadelphia with their uncle Samuel and who were part of both Philadelphia and Virginia Quaker society. In May 1784, Nancy Pleasants married Thomas Thompson, in Virginia Leach, 23-29, Joyce H. Lindsay, comp., Marriages of Hennco County Virginia 1680-1808 (Virginia, 1960), 84, Miller and Miller, 8, 9, 52-55.

49 Mary Parker Norris (17??-1799) was the only child of Joseph Parker of Chester. She married Charles Norris (1712-1766) in 1759, becoming his second wife, and had four children Isaac, Deborah, Joseph Parker, and Charles. Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia, 1, 89, Townsend Ward, “The Germantown Road and Its Associations,” PMHB, V (1881), 12.
any further. my Love is to thy sister Betsey,\textsuperscript{50} if I had time I would write to her, now, But I will defer it untill I hear of another conveyance, and I shall be in a better humour, do my dear Sally write soon, and tell me weither, thee excuses this or no, and dont forget to send me the verses, and an account of the Dr. visit, and what he said of me. my Brother\textsuperscript{51} said the other day, he wishd SW would come to town, what for I can not say[ ] The enclos'd I wrote to thee some days ago, I send it to thee, Because I know thy indulgence to any thing that I shall send thee, it is positively all the reason I can give thee for it. Is not this long enough for any body? yet it is long enough to tire any bodys patience, pray my dear show it to no living creature. I would not send it, by any Person, but so safe a conveyance as thy good mammy will be. Adeiu! I wish you ev'ry happiness, and comfort. and am thy sincerly affectionate friend. thine with increasing tenderness D N—
April 18 1778.

LETTER THREE

Deborah Norris, Delaware, to Sarah Wister, Philadelphia

[December 26, 1778]

And so my dear Sally I have found out who this Regimental Beau who I mentioned in my Chester letter,\textsuperscript{52} is, he did not take the rout to Philadelphia as I told you he did for the following morning I seen him in Willmington, and on enquiry learned he was a colonel Fitzjarrel,\textsuperscript{53} late one of Gen. Washingtons aid de camp's, he has lately resignd, and was on his way to Virginia when we met him, and so much for the Colonel.

\textsuperscript{50} Elizabeth Wister was born in 1764 and died unmarried in 1812. Like her sister Sally, Elizabeth wrote poetry and belles lettres. In later life, both Sally and Elizabeth devoted themselves to caring for their invalid mother Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, I, 266.

\textsuperscript{51} Debby Norris refers to her eldest brother, Isaac (1760-1802), who became a Roman Catholic after travelling in France. He did not marry E. Digby Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen The Making of a National Upper Class (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), 71, Hinshaw, 608, Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, I, 89.

\textsuperscript{52} From the reference to the "chester letter," we can infer that Debby Norris was staying with her cousins Mary (Polly) Norris Dickinson and John Dickinson at their Delaware estate.

\textsuperscript{53} The reference is to John Fitzgerald, Captain 3rd Va., 1776, Lt.-Colonel and Aide-de-Camp to General Washington, November 1776-July 1778, wounded at Monmouth, June 1778, Major 9th Virginia from January 1777 until his resignation in July 1778. Hetman, 229.
we have had a most delightful journey, but I think I met with no adventure, until we got to the Cross Roads, where we met with a very kind reception from the Parents of that amiable Girl Sally Fisher,⁵⁴ it was seventh day Evening when we arrived, that evening I made an acquaintance with Michael Offley,⁵⁵ Sally also introduced me to her Brother⁵⁶ who Is very clever, and we four set up two hours after the rest of the family, so much were we pleased with each others company. the next day we went to meeting (about a mile off) and these two Beaus waited on us, I was much pleased with Michael their is an honest simplicity, in him that I can not help valuing, he never Compliments but tell’s evry body their fault’s mine he has not yet discovered after meeting he came up to me, to bid me good by, gave me a kind Invitation to his house, which Sally Fisher say’s he call’s High Offley, told me he should go to Philada. in a day or two, shook hand’s and mounted his horse, now we may say what we please but I verily think we missed his company, and to endeavour to mitigate our concern at loosing him we went to take a walk (followed by all ye Children) in the afternoon this was I say, we wandred a good way from home, and as we passd a genteel looking house a person of sally’s acquaintance being at the door insisted on our going in to see the mistress of it, we did, made a short viz and on our coming out where join’d by that person, who I will introduce thee to, tho I was not introduced myself, his name is Crosby;⁵⁷ he is a commissary, and one of the unfetterd, well he waited on us home, and on our passage we where not a little surprizd to find our train increasd by another Beau still smarter than the former, we where by this time near the door, had that been further off I make no doubt we should have still received additions; they accepted of Sally’s invitation, and both came in and drank tea with us, last mentioned Gentleman, was tall and genteel and had quite his share of Comlyness, he was habited in a Lyons Skin, and made a very good figure, after a little while Sally got up to attend to

⁵⁴ Sarah (Sally) Fisher (1758-1789) of Duck Creek Cross Roads, Delaware, was a close friend and correspondent of Debby Norris. In 1784, she married the prosperous Delaware farmer William Corbit, a widower, but lived only five years afterwards. Sweeney, 188-89
⁵⁵ Michael Offley of Kent County, Delaware, lived at High Offley. By November 1781 he had married a woman named Elizabeth, but further information is unavailable. Sweeney, 215
⁵⁶ The reference is probably to Joshua Fisher (1761-1791), brother of Sally Fisher of Duck Creek Cross Roads, a talented young lawyer. Sweeney, 196, Anna Wharton Smith, Genealogy of the Fisher Family, 1682-1896 (Philadelphia, 1896), 58
⁵⁷ Perhaps Lt. Jesse Crosby (17??-1791), later Capt.-Lt. of Pennsylvania Artillery, wounded at Green Springs, 6 July 1781. Heitman, 179.
the duties of the tea table and left us to entertain each other, our conversation was a good deal political, and as we where all three very polite and moderate it was not disagreeable, in the course of our chat I found out that Barker\textsuperscript{58} (for this is the stranger's name) had servd in the Army in the last campaign, and I took the liberty to ask him in what capacity he told me he was a lieutenant in Colonel Proctor's regiment, but that he had resignd and now keeps a store at ye Cross Roads, he then asked me if I was in Philadelphia last winter, and on my answering in the affirmative they both drew their chairs nearer to mine.

but it is positively agoing for 12 oclock so I must bid thee adeiu for to night.

I have reasume'd my pen, and with it my subject, I satisfied their Curiosiy and we had a continuance of chat, after Sally Fisher join'd us, I seen a little peice of delicacy in Crosby's behaviour that said more to me in his favour than twenty recommendatory letter's cd. have done. The next morning, S F observed B—r was still dressd in his best coat, which she said was uncommon and insisted upon it he was arrayd in his holliday suit, on purpose to look agreeable to.—herself I say.

We dined the day that we left Cross Roads at Dr. Millers,\textsuperscript{59} his wife is a most agreeable woman, and has the remains of a very pretty face, she is cheerful lively and affable, his daughter's are very fine Girls, the eldest Betsey is tall and Graceful with a good share of beauty, good teeth and hair, and the roses of health blooming on her cheek's. Polly is not so tall as her sister tho she is perfectly genteel and unaffectedly beautiful, her feature soft, and regular, with plenty of fine chesnut hair, which she wore on the prettiest roll imaginable without a cap, you may think this picture exaggerated, but I declare it is not, I did not expect to have found such beautiful Elegance of person & manners so retired from the world. These Girls have promissd to come and see me they live I believe 9 mile's from us, Adeiu my dear Sally I have a number of letter's to write, for which I am not sufficiently provided with subject, as I have not yet been from home, and have seen none but our own family.

\textsuperscript{58} 2nd Lt. Joseph Barker, who joined the 4th Continental Artillery in March 1777 and resigned one year later. Hetman, 87.

\textsuperscript{59} The reference may be to the parents and sisters of Dr Edward Miller (1760-1812), the famous physician who wrote on yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox vaccination Dr Miller lived in Delaware and New York. Henry C Conrad, History of the State of Delaware (Wilmington, Dec., 1908), III, 1059-61
We have a deep snow, I am in hope's it will bring us some Visitor's, I suppose you are now contriving a party, but I guess from the known inattention of your Beau's, it is not carried into execution, Please to present affectionate love to thy mammy and Betsey from cousin Polly and myself, and then take a large share for thyself. I have made a sort of rhime without intending to do it fare thee well. D. Norris.

Hermitage dec. 26 1778.  

Sally sends her love to Hannah Sukey and dear little Johnny—as do I affectionate love from me to S. and N Drinker

LETTER FOUR

Deborah Norris, Philadelphia, to Sarah Wister, North Wales

[July 27, 1779]
3d day night

By this time my dear Sally Wister is, (I hope) safe arrived at her journeys end and not so much fatigued as her fears anticipated she would be. nothing remarkable has occurd in the course of this day, Sally Jones paid me a visit towards evening. We were together tete a tete for an hour in the back parlour, our conversation was various, we talkd of cousin Robert, and the report, our sentiments of a certain graceful damsel

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60 Debby refers to her first cousin Mary (Polly) (Norris) Dickinson (1740-1803), only surviving child of Isaac and Sarah (Logan) Norris, and heiress to a fortune estimated between £50,000 and £80,000. In July 1770 she married John Dickinson (1732-1808). Myers, 196, Charles Stille, The Life and Times of John Dickinson, 1732-1808 (Philadelphia, 1891), 313-17, Sweeney, 196.

61 Hermitage was the name of the Fisher home at Duck Creek Cross Roads, Delaware. Sweeney, 208.

62 Sally Wister’s two sisters Hannah (1767-1827) and Susannah (1773-1862) and her little brother John (1776-1798). Susannah married John Morgan Price in 1796 and John married Elizabeth Harvey in 1798. Hannah Wister did not marry. Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania, I, 266.

63 Although Debby Norris writes several times of “Cousin Robert,” a family relation of that name cannot be traced. But since “cousin” often indicated courtesy rather than family relationship, Debby may be speaking of Robert Pleasants (1773-1796), brother of her close friends Nancy and Polly Pleasants in Virginia. Known as Robert Pleasants of Four Mile Creek to differentiate him from his father, Robert of Curles, he married Elizabeth Randolph, a descendent of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, in 1784. Letters written by Robert of Curles to his brother Samuel Pleasants show that young Robert and his sisters often visited Philadelphia. Dubin, Pleasants section, 27, Leach, 25, Miller and Miller, 53.
and her inducements exactly correspond; indeed my dear a thousand allowances ought to be made for one of our sex, that gets entangled, as I think is plainly this poor Lady's case, but mum for this. poor John Mifflin has got the fever and ague, his friend went to condole with him this afternoon and will I suppose stay all night as it is now late and rains very fast, I wonder what they will dream!

did thee know or has thee ever heard of Old James Waggstaffe the tin man, & he had it seems been married to five or six wives and happening to be once at my dear Aunt Betty's she made him tell how he woo'd and won them all, I think it was the fourth that repulsed him, the poor man was in doleful dumps, but some little time after meeting with his dulcinia in the street, she address's him with "Well James mountains my meet, but we cannot: he took this for encouragement, renewed his visits, and found her more propitious; Now I dont intend to take notice to a gentleman of my acquaintance, who I have not seen this month that it is almost as impossible for us to meet as for Genl. Washington and Sir Harry to hold a conference I agree, you may live and learn, Don Pedro told me this story the other day and see how I have profitted by it, adeiu it is bed time I will reasume my pen to morrow, but prehaps not my spirits.

Fifth day morning July 29th 1779

What shall I chat to my dear Sally about? I wish I knew the subject she would like, or the humour she is in, and then I could guess at the subject. Mrs Logan has got into her new house, my brother saw her and Charles standing at the door yesterday morning, he was elegantly dressd, and she was in the green mantua, I have never saw her since she

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64 John Fishbourne Mifflin (1759-1813) was the son of John Mifflin and his second wife, Sarah (Fishbourne) Mifflin. He graduated from the College of Philadelphia in 1775 and became a prominent lawyer in Philadelphia. In 1788 he married Clementina Ross Fountain Green, mentioned at the end of the letter, was the Mifflin family estate on the Schuylkill River Dublin, Mifflin family section, n p , Myers, 199, Sweeney, 208-10, Thompson Westcott, The Historic Mansions and Buildings of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1895)


66 Don Pedro is perhaps a fanciful reference to Peter Zachary Lloyd (1750- ), who became a Captain in March 1776 and General Ewing's Aide-de-Camp from August to November 1776. Later he served as Clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly. Debby mentions him in other letters as a friend. Hetman, 355, Myers, 200
passd her last meeting—I quite long for the day to come on which I shall pay her a visit—Only to think not once drank tea with her since I came from Kent, but I have frequently (in comparison however) calld in to see her; this is a strange world! friendships are made and bound in it, dissolved and pass away like the basest fabric of a vision leaving no traces of a wreck behind and yet it is so common that the generallity of mankind seldom bestow a thought on it.

thee has read my last half sheet of a journal, I wanted sadly to talk to Sally Jones about the conclusion of it last night, but she would not let me hush my dear Girl dont say another word about it, or thee will give me a great deal of pain I was afraid it would look like a false shame to avoid saying any thing about it in person. and as if my acknowledgment was not sincere, I beg thee to beleive it was. And if thee will be so generous as to forgive, we will for ever close a subject that has caused a great deal of uneasiness to me. my dearest cousin Dickinson is better, I told her of thy excursion to N Wales and she sends her wishes that it may prove agreeable, do remember me affectionatly to all my acquaintance thee may meet with. expect to hear from me by every oppertunity, and I know thee will excuse the shortness of this, when I tell thee that I am now agoing to attend to the dictates of conscience and write a letter to the amiable Maria 67 adeiu my dearest. D Norris

ps.
I have just received the following note from J. Mifflin

"Dispel thy fears for well I ween
His grace is safe at fountain Green
Nor let it be a cause of sorrow
If he should not return to-morrow."

To Miss d Norris. J M—

67 Probably Mary (Polly) Fishbourne.
LETTER FIVE

Deborah Norris, Philadelphia, to
Sarah Wister, North Wales

[August 2, 1779]

I set down to give my sweet friend some account of yesterday. The morning was not very favorable however Sally, call'd, and to the hill meeting we went, shall I be very particular? Sally was dress'd in her brown mantua, white skirt and shoes, new bonnet, and white gloves, my ladiship had on a blue satin petticoat and painted muslin habit, we thought ourselves tolerably nice, till fate directed Mrs Logan to a seat near us, she was array'd in bridal finery, and look'd most elegantly in her white mantua, I wish'd her happiness. So far the morning, after dinner I call'd upon Sally, and we met Robert just at the meeting house gate before I proceede any further I must insist on thy not beleiving any thing Sally may tell thee about my opinions. Eliza, Sally, Becky, my brother Jo and your humble servant, (not Robert, my dear) drank tea with Hannah Foulke, spent a clever chit chat afternoon, and then returning to frd. J's met cousin Robert, we sat a hour in the entry, which was very agreeable, but not to compare to the walk which ensued, Robert offer'd his arm to me, I accepted of it, it was dusk my dear, and after a while Eliza took the other, then he said he was doubly bless'd, dont laugh if I commend him, he is polite, agreeable, entertaining, and attentive, but I am all myself, our walk was long, and during it Sally suffered much from apprehensions of spirits, goblins, ugly looking men and so forth, tho she had Jo for a protector, at length we arrived at Norris Castle, where they favord me for one delightful hour with their company Our conversation was lively, sentimental agreeable, Sally declared she had not spent so sweet a day for this long time past, Eliza was pleas'd my spirits exhilerated but not too much, Joe's honest heart was expanded, and Robert was happy in all our happiness. —I had nothing on reflection to reproach myself with, tho with the most perfect innocense I said something, I did not think it delicate in the Girls to titter at it, Robert laugh'd, I am sure it was only to keep the hussy's in

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68 Sally Jones.
69 Debby refers to Elizabeth Wister, Sally's sister; Sally and Becky Jones, Sally Wister's aunts; and Debby's brother Joseph Parker.
70 Presumably Norris Castle is Debby's humorous reference to her home.
countenance I was confused I was very serious, he observed my un-
affected distress, and extricated me from it by instantly changing the
discourse, my grateful heart thank'd him in silence, I was again lively
and cheerful, no impropriety at all in what I said, it was their ideas, ask
me all about it when thee comes to town. I had a beautiful dream about a
young Irish Peer his person and behaviour exactly like somebody's, he
was no officer I can assure thee, but a genteel quaker tho Phebe
insists upon it he was a Catholic from his name Fitzpatrick what a true irish
name, and yet it is true I dreamd it. Isaac says I have the most romantic
dreams of any girl breathing for the scene lay the other night in the East
Indies. I flew over the ocean, and as I passd by the eastern iles, I saw the
hills crownd with woods, the aspiring turrets, lofty groves of palm trees
& silent vales, all gilded with the rays of the setting sun, the most
beautiful flocks of sheep grazing in the meadows, the air was filld with
odors, all was Oriental! all was charming!—but why do I this teize thee
with my reviries?—one thing relative to the Evening however I must
not forget, Sally Jones (much as I love the dear Creature I must tell of
her) she had a line continually baited, fish, fish, fish, fish, Fishing, for
compliments, we talkd of dress, her pearl mantua was too delicate by far
for her complection, I sd. it ws very handsome and she became it, or it
became her, most admirably, ‘Oh said cousin R. if she looks so well in
her common dress, in that she must be enchanting, You Miss Norris
have on a very beautiful gown,’ I said it was not suitable for the season
and thus ended the dissertation upon dress, not so the fishery, Robert
wishd for a whale boat that she might more conveniently carry home her
prey,—and she screamed. To morrow every thing propitious we go to
Fountain Green, and this is to be the form and order of going, Patty,
Becky Jones and sister Eliza in Johnny Dickinsons chariot, the Duke
their escorte on horseback, Sally Jones and brother Jo in a chair, J.
Mifflin is to come down with their chair and Miss Norris will accept of
a seat in it, Oh I am in a toss, quandary, and meditation least the day
prove unfavorable, Mamma's unconsenting, or beasts unengageable,
what shall I be dressd in? advise my sweet Girl advise me, but come I
must lay down my pen I write quite frantically Adeiu,

71 The reference to Phebe cannot be traced.
72 The reference to Patty Jones is problematical (see note 45). The other references are once
again to Becky Jones and Elizabeth Wister.
I resume it not much more composed tho, it rains very hard the drops falling from the eves, form the wild ideas and soothe the mind to pensiveness.—this evening Jo brought thy letter I was suprize’d to see favour Dr Foulke, but my brother instantly told me he returns to morrow and will call in the morning for a letter, then this scrawl must go. —thanks thanks for thy kind epistle, Oh how delightful is this said way of communicating your thoughts and how much obliged are we to the inventors of this useful art which enables us to

‘Waft a sigh from Indus to the pole.’

thank Prissy and Liddy for me, most gladly would I accept of their invitation if I could, Dr Foulkes bon mot has pleased me excessively ‘the young fellows now a-days have more spirit than horses’; is it not very good my dear? Well but to morrow if it is fair, we go Mamma kindly consented, and has asked cousin Dickinson’s equipage for me, and it is at my service, my brother Joseph is disappointed of the chair tho—I wish thee was to be one of the party Dr Foulke and cousin Robert, What an agreeable addition! but we are not to have perfection in this life, oh I could be grave and serious and moralizing now, if my spirits would let me, but fate decreed me a strange being, made up of inconsistencies I think—a rap this moment at the door I love to write to the moment, away I ran to the head of the stairs, who’s there is it Jont Jones? No sd. brother Jo, it is doctor Molleston, tho I know better, it is John Mifflin, and so it is, he is now setting in the entry talking, I hear the unintelligible sound of voices ascend the stair case, I go to hear, and perhaps to be heard for Sally Jones had the assurance to say I talked loud and much, no I don’t I think. thee will laugh at my folly, indeed it is what thee can’t avoid doing when I tell thee, that I have been prevailed upon to read part of this letter to J. Mifflin. I read (to divert too close an attention excuse me Sally) an extract of thine, he liked the style it was sprightly and interesting, he praised it had never been so happy before as to see any of thy productions see it, he did not, he sat at a respectful distance and I culled out the prettiest part of what thee wrote, tho all would have done high credit to any Girl of Philada. once more I say excuse me, and let me entreat beg, and beseech thee not to take so mortifying a revenge as to let Dr. Foulke be a witness of my folly, by our sacred our inviolable friendship I conjure thee.

73 Jonathan Jones (1762-1822) was the youngest son of Owen and Susannah Jones and therefore Sally Wister’s uncle. He married twice. (1) Mary Potts and (2) Mary (Thomas) McClennahan, a widow. Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia, 1, 631.

74 The allusion to Dr. Molleston cannot be traced.
J M says the roads are very bad it has rained incessantly this afternoon, and so our jaunt is deferred until the next day. My cousin Polly is a little better I told her Dr Foulke was at N W with thee and she directly said, 'he is an admirer of Sally Wister then, a particular one is he not? I replied 'that I did not doubt but the world would look upon him in that light, tho I believed at present however, it was not a just one,' did I do right my dear? Isaac wanted his friend to stay all night, he could not he said, he was not in very good spirits, quite agreeable tho—does thee remember a conversation we had. one night when the moon shone sweetly in at a certain window? how exactly alike were our sentiments!

Mamma desires her love—make allowances for this scrawl and be assured that however indiscreet some actions may be the heart of Ardelia is dilated with the purest sentiments of friendship, tenderness, and affection for thee.—

Philada August 2d 1779.

LETTER SIX

Ardelia [Deborah Norris], Philadelphia, to Sarah Wister, North Wales

August 6th. 1779

Read the inclosed first.

Well my dear, I have been to pay this said visit to Mrs. Logan, I sent her word in the morning, and received for answer her love and she would be glad to see me: I was dress’d in my new suite of blue mantua, and to confess the truth took more pains than common with regard to my appearance, it was after five when I went, she received me herself at the front door, assured me she was very glad to see me, but did not offer to salute me, she then led to the front parlour I followed, there was her sister Sally Fisher, Myers Fishers wife, and Becky Wharton, I was a

75 Isaac Norris, Debby’s eldest brother
76 Sally Fisher of Philadelphia (1759-1789) was yet another member of the Norris-Wister social circle She married Abijah Dawes (1748-1816), a Philadelphia merchant Sarah (Redwood) Fisher (1755-1847) was the wife of Miers Fisher (1748-1819), Sally Fisher’s brother and a successful Quaker lawyer The Logans and the Fishers were related by marriage Smith, 49-52, Sweeney, 201
77 Rebecca Wharton (1761-1807) was the daughter of James and Mary Wharton She did not marry Anne H Wharton, “The Wharton Family,” PMHB, I (1877), 327
little embarrssd, and that but for one moment I seated myself and joind in the conversation, presently after Sukey and Nancy Jones entered. 78 Molly behaved just as she formerly used to do. she had an Elegant service of tea china the very finest of tea, sugar, and Queen's cake; but extreamly thin has she grown, none of the guests made their visit long, they all left her before dusk, I was the last, she asked me to set at the door I did, we had not been long seated when John Thomson 79 came up—and soon after I asked for my bonnet and took leave John waited upon me home. Charles made not his appearance; I desired her to give my respects to him and tell him I expected to have had the pleasure this afternoon of wishing him a greal deal of happiness, Sukey Jones said too something very much like it.

I was going this morning to see thy mamma and Eliza but it raind and prevented me.

I wish with earnestness for thy return, Jonathan goes to morrow, besieure do not exceed second day I shall give him abundance of charges on this score. I have a world of things to say to thee which are not writeable—

Mamma sends her love to thee, remember us in the most respectful manner to friend Foulkes family—Only to think if we had movd to North Wales as we once intended I should have been personally acquainted with Major S. Colonel W: Genl. S. Mr W. Capt T and above

78 The references are to Sally Wister's aunts Susannah (1747- ), who married John Nancarrow, and Ann (1752- ), who did not marry Jordan, Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Philadelphia, I, 631.

79 John Thompson ( -1834) became a 1st Lt. in Miles' Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment in March 1776 and Captain of 2d Canadian Regiment in November 1776, but resigned in October 1777. On October 9, 1783, he married Hannah Drinker at the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting. Scattered references to him also appear in the Diary of Grace Growden Galloway Heitman, 540, Hinshaw, 2 p. 666, Grace Growden Galloway, Diary, PMHB, 55 (1931), 34-94, 58 (1934), 152-89.
all with the renowned Captain Alexander Spotswood Dandridge⁸⁰ does not his name sweetly vibrate in the Ear? is there not music in it? is it not very charming? yes Debby it is but thee could mention another name quite as pleasing, would I know be thy answer, if thee answerd with thy usual candor.

Adeiu my dear Girl, thee is too tired of this insupportable scrawl to listen with any kind of patience to an apology I was about to offer for it.

Respects to Dr Foulke. and affectionate love to thyself is all that shall be added at present by thy devoted Ardelia

University of Arkansas at
Little Rock

Kathryn Zabelle Derounian

⁸⁰ Sally Wister met all these officers while they were billeted at Hannah Foulke's farmhouse in North Wales. They appear frequently in the pages of her journal and must have also appeared in Sally's letters to Debby. (1) For information on Major William Truman Stoddard, see note 40. (2) Colonel W. refers to James Wood (1750-1813), a Virginian by birth. In 1775 he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, and in 1776 he was appointed Colonel of the Twelfth (later Eighth) Regiment of the Virginia Line. He served from 1776 to 1783. Heitman, 603, Myers, 82. (3) Genl S. refers to William Smallwood (1732-1792), who was born in Maryland but received his education in England. In January 1776, he became Colonel of the Maryland Regiment and fought at the Battles of Brooklyn Heights, White Plains, Brandywine, and Germantown. In 1780, he became a Major General. Although elected to Congress in 1785, he accepted the position of Governor of Maryland, which he held from 1785 to 1788. Heitman, 500-01. (4) Mr. W. was John Watts (1755-1830), who rose to Captain of the First Continental Dragoons by 1778. Though wounded at Eutaw Springs, he served to the close of the War. He died at his home in Bedford County, Virginia. Heitman, 576, Myers, 154. (5) Capt T probably refers to Robert Tilly, of Virginia, Paymaster of Grayson's Continental Regiment from April 1777 until his resignation in August 1778. Sally Wister's journal described Tilly at length. Heitman, 544. (6) Captain Alexander Spotswood Dandridge (1753-1785) rose from Lieutenant of the 4th Virginia Dragoons (1776) to Captain of the 1st Continental Dragoons (1777), but resigned in 1780. He married Anne Stephen, daughter of General Adam Stephen, and lived at his Virginia plantation, the Bower, until his early death in 1785. Heitman, 184, Myers, 156-58