

From Liverpool to New York in 1850

When George and Mercy Ripley, the daughter of Hannah Denison formerly Marsden née Sinclair, and their family emigrated to the USA in the spring of 1850, they emigrated together with a man named John Holdsworth and his family. John was five years older than George, having been baptised at Elland on 29th June 1817. He was the brother of my great-great-great-grandfather, Abraham Holdsworth. John Holdsworth and George Ripley were friends and fellow miners. Indeed, George had acted as one of the witnesses to John's second marriage, which occurred at All Saints' Church, Dewsbury on 3rd February 1850, just a month before the two families sailed for America. During the voyage, John Holdsworth wrote a letter to his brother, recounting the crossing, and, amazingly, a copy of this letter survives, the details of which follow.

First, some background information about how I acquired the letter. In the mid-1970s a young American couple, named Wilson, came to Yorkshire researching their family history. They stayed in Mirfield, the town where I live, with relatives called Hall. I believe they must have been descendants of John William Wilson and his wife Fanny (née Holdsworth), who emigrated to the USA in 1886, as one of their ancestors appears to have been Abraham Holdsworth, the father of Fanny. I met them when they visited my maternal grandparents, presumably because my grandmother, whose maiden name was Wilson, was one of their distant cousins, being the niece of John William Wilson and, at the same time, the great-niece of Fanny Wilson, as well as the great-granddaughter of Abraham Holdsworth. They brought with them a typed copy of a letter seemingly written to Abraham *Houldsworth* of "Hopton in Mirfield" by his brother, John *Houldsworth* in 1850, whilst he was emigrating to the USA. They gave a copy of the letter to my grandparents, and, in turn, my family made a copy of this, but I don't know who possesses the original letter, who transcribed it and typed it up or whether the Wilsons acquired their copy in the USA or from relatives in Mirfield. The letter does seem to be authentic, though, as I have been able to find all of the different individuals named in the letter in the historical records (parish registers, UK National Birth Indexes, UK censuses, USA federal censuses) and confirm their relationships to one another. In addition, the dates given for Easter Sunday and Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) in the letter are accurate for the year 1850, and the statement "May 9th Holy Thursday it is your feast day and I hope you will enjoy it well" is correct, too, as Holy Thursday was the day on which the town of Mirfield held its annual fair or, as it is known in Yorkshire, "feast".

Although John Houldsworth makes no mention of the name of the ship on which he is travelling, confirmation that the letter is genuine comes from the passenger list of the ship, *Charles Crooker*, which arrived at New York from Liverpool on 14th May 1850, and which contains the following five individuals, who, despite the difference in the spelling of their surname, would match with those mentioned in the letter:

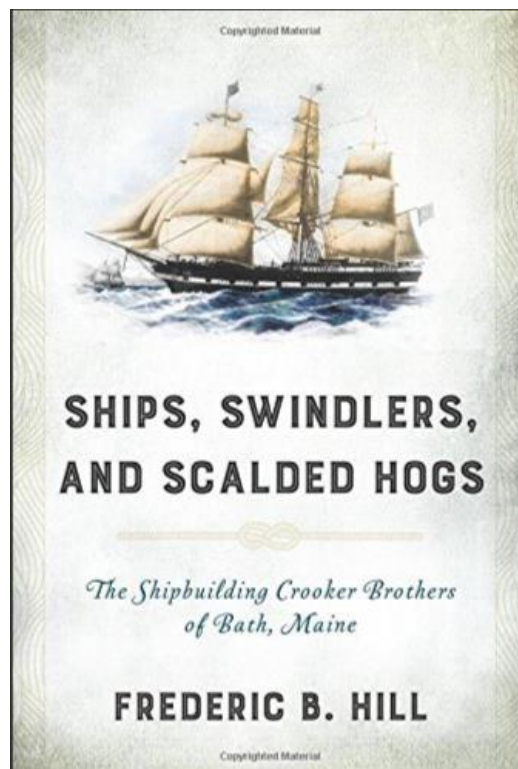
278 Jno Oldworth	M	30	Miner	England	Pittsburgh
279 Harriet Oldworth	F	30			
280 George Oldworth	M	7			
281 Abraham Oldworth	M	3			
282 Richard Oldworth	M	Inft			

I suspect the family surname has been recorded as "Oldworth" due to John's broad Yorkshire accent and the way in which he pronounced his own surname, including the Yorkshire trait of dropping the letter aitch at the start of words. Significantly, the passengers listed immediately after John Oldworth and his family are the family of George Ripley, who is mentioned in the letter.

According to the Maritime History of Bath, Maine and the Kennebec River Region, Vol. II, p. 829, by William A. Baker, published by Marine Research Society of Bath, Bath, ME, 1973 the ship *CHARLES CROOKER* was built in Bath, Maine, USA in 1849, by Johnson Rideout for owners C. & W. D. Crooker, with Master Chas. C. Duncan. At the same time another ship, the *HANNAH CROOKER*, was built by the same shipbuilders. There are some paintings of the ship *HANNAH CROOKER* of Bath which was presumably very similar, if not identical, to the ship *CHARLES CROOKER*.



The illustration on the front of a book with an interesting title also gives some idea of what the Crooker brothers' ships looked like.



John's letter takes the form of a diary, describing the events of the voyage from Liverpool to New York during the months of March, April and May 1850. From the details John includes, it is evident that the crossing was an extremely difficult one, with the ship encountering very adverse weather conditions and the journey taking almost twice as long as it was expected to take.

I have typed up John Houldsworth's letter to Abraham Houldsworth exactly as it appears in the copy given to my grandparents in the mid-1970s. I have retained John's idiosyncratic spellings, but where I suspect a spelling mistake or an incorrect word has been inserted by the person typing up the letter, either as a result of a typographical or transcriptional error, I have written the correct word in brackets after the word. John included very little punctuation in his letter, so, to make it easier to read, the one alteration I have made is to leave a slightly larger space in the text to indicate where there should be a break between sentences. A new line has also been begun for each new diary entry.

The advertisement from the *Liverpool Albion* of 11th March 1850 showing the expected departure date and specification of the *CHARLES CROOKER* under Captain Duncan plus the provisions to be provided for each passenger.



**FOR
NEW YORK.**

	To sail.
NESTORIAN, GOODHUE, 1,600 tons	This Day.
GUY MANNERING, EDWARDS, 2,300 tons.....	To-morrow.
CHARLES CROOKER, DUNCAN, 1,800 tons	16th Mar.
GIPSY, ELLIS, 1,650 tons	18th Mar.
JOSEPHINE, CROCKER, 1,200 tons	21st Mar.
ALBERT GALLATIN, DELANO, 2,000 tons	24th Mar.
MASONIC, CONY, 1,250 tons	26th Mar.
HUGENOT, GARDINER, 1,850 tons	30th Mar.
MARY WARD, LITTLE, 1,350 tons	1st April.

For BOSTON,

SILAS LEONARD, THOMPSON, 1,300 tons.....	14th Mar.
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For NEW ORLEANS,

GEO. W. BOURNE, NASON, 1,700 tons	14th Mar.
LIVERPOOL, IRVING 1,750 tons	17th Mar.
URIEL, SIMPSON, 1,750 tons	25th Mar.

For QUEBEC,

A SHIP	5th April.
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These Ships are all of the largest class; coppered and copper-fastened; remarkably swift sailers; and fitted up with every requisite to ensure the comfort of passengers. The following quantities of provisions will be supplied to each passenger:—
 2½ lbs. navy biscuit, 1 lb. flour, 5 lbs. Oatmeal, 2 lbs. rice, 1 lb. pork, ½ lb. sugar, ½ lb. molasses, and 2 oz. of tea weekly, and 3 quarts of water daily. For further particulars apply to
J. W. SHAW and CO., 90, Waterloo-road.

LIVERPOOL. March 17th/1850

Dear Fathers & Mothers, Sisters & Brothers and all Friends,

I now take the pleasure of writing a few lines stating a few particulars of our voyage to you and the present situation we are in. There is 400 & 50 passengers on board & 400 of them are Irish we left the Dock at one o'clock at noon the steam tug took us up the river and left us till Monday it was a fine day there were thousands of people to see us it was a fine sight to see we paid three £27. 10s for the Stearage we staid one night but did not like so we paid three more to go into the Poop is (it) cost me £15 George Ripley £15.10.

March 18th fine morning the steam tug took us away at one o'clock & left us to the mercy of the wind and waves our George stood on deck all day on Sunday he got cold & as a stiff neck. Abraham & Richard is very lightsome.

19th George is a little better but I think he is going to be sea sick we have Wales & Hole-head in view but few ships in sight 2 o'clock 60 miles from Liverpool our George is sick we have a good many sick on board.

20th we have had a good night we have Ireland in view 12 o'clock we have land in sight three o'clock we are becalmed the sun shines bright but I must go to bed so good night.

21 George is well again we have got our ships allowance today I will put it down per week for the voyage.

Flour	6½ lbs.
Brown Bread	16¼ lbs.
Meal	32¼ lbs.
Rice	13 lbs.
Sugar	3¼ lbs.
Molisms (Molasses)	3¼ lbs
Tea	13 lbs.

22 all well spoke to a ship.

23 George and Harriot is sick we have got 13 lbs. of Pork & one & a half of viniger George Ripley and me is to have it once a fortnight for the voyage.

24 We have had a very bad night the ship as rock'd very much George and Harriot well again we have had Wesleyans service on Deck we have got one third of our way to America we are going 12 miles an hour we are now 1000 2 hundred and fifty miles from Liverpool we have seen many sea pigs today.

25th We have one side arm broke we have had very strong winds all night.

26th strong winds all well.

27th We are going very fast we have got half way over strong winds the ship rocks & roles about very much.

28th The sea roles & roves mountains high our yard-arm broken all our sails are taken in we expect our Masts breaking every moment we are going towards Liverpool again.

March 29th Good Friday very stormy and we are lost and tumbled about the wind is against us.

30th a fine morning but the wind is against us.

31 Easter Sunday the wind is very strong it blew through the rigging the waves are tremendous they are rolling mountains high are going to Liverpool again.

April 1 the whole ocean as far as we can see was one vast collection of hills & valleys & to make the matter more serious the Glas was rapidly going down and night is coming on the waves are breaking as they followance it takes the followance vessel unawares & gives her a blow which makes her shake and jerk through all her timbers but we are going to be so good night.

2nd we had no sleep last night the vessel shook very much up jumps the Boxes Barrels and every thing else does clash boxes tumble tubs roal all things are breaking bouncing splashing & would make you feel as if ruin with all its horrors had taken hold of you our fore mast is broken and the waves are roling mountains high they will exceed 60 to one hundred feet in height

3rd in the night we had our mid-mast broken the wind is settled.

4th Going on in the right way toward New York.

5th May (April) stormy.

6th We are all in good health thank God for it becalmd.

May (April) 21st We are going backwards and forwards but getting no nearer New York a child born we have only half followance of water and not above half way over the waves dashed over our vessel and broke our Bullworks the water roled on deck and the men were over head for some time Men Women and children were crying and shouting the ship is sinking. The ship is a very good one she is slow but it is astonishing how well she mounts the waves and keeps herself from being dashed to pieces.

24th We have no case of sickness on board the wind is in our favour now so we are going towards New York.

May 1st a fine morning the sun shines bright but no wind we are still 1011 miles from New York the wind is rising and all is in our favour but I think it will be June before you hear from us we are going 8 miles an hour.

May 2nd a fine morning but no wind 12 o clock at noon 929 miles from New York we are sailing two miles an hour we are in good spirits wishing we were at New York.

Our Captain says that he expects the Queen of the West being lost he and the sailors said they never so such wether in all their lives the Captain went out in a boat into the sea the child that was born in the 21 April was brought into our place to criston the same day they was from Irland. A life on the ocean wave a home on the boiling deep is a wearisome thing to me what a change from the fresh green fields and the gardens to the boiling deep nothing to look at but the sea the sea and the open sea.

May the 3 a wet night quick sailing at 12 o clock at noon height (eight) hundred and thirty three miles from New York.

May 4 a sailor fell and put his shoulder out he died soon after he was sewed up in canvas read over then put into the sea.

May 5 a great deal of rain

May 6 our George birth Day he is well and hearty and all of us thank God for it we are 629 miles from New York a ship in sight

May 7 575 miles from New York When I shall be able to get you a letter I cannot tell.

May 8 we are 466 miles from New York we have no ships in sight I have had to ly in bed all day may (my) face is gathering again a child died last night it belonged to some Irish people

May 9th Holy Thursday it is your feast day and I hope you will enjoy it well we are 340 miles from New York and it is 8 weeks since we left home I am well again the child that died last night was put in the sea they did not read over it.

Richard Abraham and George plays about same as if they was at home our George says he will come with me when I come for our Susanah but I am afraid it will be a long time before I see her again but I never go to bed nor rise in the morning without thinking of her God bless her I wish she was with us Good night.

May 10 We have 295 miles to go before we get to New York.

May 11 We have had a great deal of lighting (lightning) and thunder & rain last night we are sailing very bad we are 205 miles from New York and now we have a dead calm again.

May 12 Sunday at noon 175 miles from New York our Captain puts the distance on the mast every day at noon the wind is rising

May the 13 Monday 11 o'clock forenoon the land of liberty is in view we have our coulers put up for a pilot the doctor has been round and passed us so we are going to land tonight as we sailed up the sand hook to New York the green trees & fields looked so beautiful it was worth coming to America to see we expect that you have heard of many ships being lost Jane-hers-sizzly was lost on the west coast New York

May 14 we have being (been) on the ship all night it is a fine morning the Queen of the West has not being (been) heard of yet she set out from Liverpool a week before us I must conclude we send our kind love to you and all relations we are all very well and hope you are the same wishing you every blessing your Country will afford I hope you and all of you will look after my daughter Susanah and see that no one puts on her dear Brother I hope you will as soon as you get this letter tak it to Brighthouse let them see that we have landed safe and all in good health thank God for it let Harriot Father and Mother know I shal write again in about a month when I have got into work

And so no more from your

brother and sister

John & Harriot Houldsworth

Abraham Houldsworth,
Hopton in Mirfield,
near Dewsbury,
England,
Yorkshire.

The declaration by Captain Charles C. Duncan on the arrival of the *CHARLES CROOKER* into New York Port signed on 14th May 1850.

Geo. Ambrose & Co. Stationers, 20 Pine-st. N. Y.

DISTRICT OF NEW-YORK—PORT OF NEW-YORK.

Charles C. Duncan do solemnly, sincerely, and truly *swear* that the following List or Manifest of Passengers, subscribed with my name, and now delivered by me to the Collector of the Customs for the District of New-York, contains, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a just and true account of all the Passengers received on board the *Ship Charles Crooker* whereof I am Master, from *Liverpool* So help me God.

Sworn to this *14th May 1850*
Before me *[Signature]*

LIST or MANIFEST of all the PASSENGERS taken on board the *Ship Charles Crooker* whereof
C C Duncan is Master, from *Liverpool* burthen, *560* tons.

My research has identified the following individuals as the people mentioned in the letter:

John Ho(u)ldsworth – the writer of the letter.

John, son of Abraham Holdsworth and his wife, Hannah (née Taylor), was baptised at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Elland on 29th June 1817. The occupation of John's father was recorded as "Boatman". John's obituary of 1888 states that "his father died when he was but two and a half years old and his mother was compelled to put him to work in the coal mines when but nine years old".

Abraham Ho(u)ldsworth of Hopton in Mirfield - the recipient of the letter and the brother of John Ho(u)ldsworth.

Abraham, son of Abraham and Hannah Holdsworth, was baptised at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Elland on 2nd April 1820. Abraham was a fancy weaver and, from at least the time of the 1841 census, had lived in Hopton, Mirfield. When the 1851 UK census was taken, he was living at Chapel Hill, Upper Hopton.

George Holdsworth, the son of John Holdsworth and his first wife, Mary Ann (née Egan). Although George's birth was registered in the second quarter of 1842 in the Registration District of Halifax (Ref: 1842 Jun Halifax 22 185), he was not baptised until 14th December 1845 at St Martin's Church, Brighouse.

Abraham Ho(u)ldsworth, the son of John Holdsworth and his first wife, Mary Ann (née Egan). Abraham's birth was registered in the second quarter of 1846 in the Registration District of Halifax (Ref: 1846 Jun Halifax 22 204), he was not baptised until 12th January 1849 at St Martin's Church, Brighouse.

Richard Ho(u)ldsworth, the son of John Holdsworth and his first wife, Mary Ann (née Egan). Although Richard's birth was registered in the second quarter of 1848 in the Registration District of Halifax (Ref: 1848 Jun Halifax 22 211), he was not baptised until 16th January 1849 at St Martin's Church, Brighouse.

Susanna(h) Ho(u)ldsworth, the daughter of John Holdsworth and his first wife, Mary Ann (née Egan). Although Susanna(h)'s birth was registered in the first quarter of 1844 in the Registration District of Halifax (Ref: 1844 Mar Halifax 22 185), she was not baptised until 14th December 1845 at St Martin's Church, Brighouse. She was baptised at the same time as her brother, Abraham. Susanna(h) did not emigrate to the USA with her father, step-mother and brothers but remained in Brighouse. The 1851 UK census records her as a member of the household of her maternal grandparents, Richard and Susan(nah) Egan. Although in his letter, John Ho(u)ldsworth states his intention of returning to England at a later date and of taking Susannah back with him to the USA, this was never to be. Susannah died in Halifax on 9th July 1866 at the age of 22.

Harriot Ho(u)ldsworth, the second wife of John Holdsworth. Her maiden name was "Tranter". She was the daughter of Edward Tranter, a forge man, and his wife, Margaret (née Walker) and was baptised at St Thomas's Church, Dudley, Worcestershire on 21st November 1819. John Holdsworth's marriage to Harriet Tranter took place at the Parish Church of All Saints, Dewsbury on 3rd February 1850, just a month before their emigration to the USA. One of the witnesses to the marriage was George Ripley.

George Ripley, clearly a friend of John Ho(u)ldsworth and a fellow coalminer, who, with his family, emigrated on the *Charles Crooker* to the USA together with John's family. He matches with the George, son of Elizabeth Ripley, who was baptised at St Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe on 3rd November 1822 and with the George Ripley who married Mercy Sinclair at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Elland on 10th November 1844.

At the time of the 1850 US federal census, the family of John Ho(u)ldsworth (misspelt as "Oldsworth") and the family of George Ripley are listed at Chippewa Township, Wayne County, Ohio."

Derrick Rooke

With additional material from

D.M.Barker

March 2025

Read both parts of

Hannah Denison formerly Marsden née Sinclair

to find out what life was like in the USA for the Ripley family.