

**Letter from James Lampton to Wharton Lampton
Submitted by Glen Haney**

Reprinted below is an extraordinary letter printed in the in the Moberly (Missouri) Dailey Index newspaper dated Dec 1, 1916. The letter is not only remarkable in its interesting content relating to Carter County but it is, perhaps, even more noteworthy in that apparently, the editor was unaware who was carrying on the correspondence. Both the writer of the letter, James Lampton and recipient, Wharton Lampton were Uncles of Samuel Clemens, A.K.A. Mark Twain.

To my knowledge the existence of this letter is unknown even to Mark Twain scholars. In my research, I uncovered another unrecognized Carter County native; William James Lampton. He was the grandson of the letters author, James. William James was born in Lawrence County, Ohio "within sight of the Kentucky line" and spent much of his youth at Star Furnace. While he did not reach the height of fame that his famous cousin Mark Twain did, he was nevertheless a very popular poet and writer in his day.

Although apparently rebuffed by Mark Twain in their earlier days they later became friends.

Following the letter reprint of the letter I have attached a few items relating to William James. Note that Star Furnace is misspelled as Store Furnace.

<p>OLD LETTER FROM KENTUCKY FOUND</p> <p>EPISTLE ADDRESSED TO WHARTON S. LAMPTON AT FLORIDA VERY INTERESTING.</p> <p>The following letter addressed to Mr. Wharton S. Lampton at Florida, Monroe County, Missouri is one of real interest. It portrays the customs of the day and is well worth reading. It is:</p> <p>Store Furnace, Carter County, Ky. February 18, 1850.</p> <p>Dear Brother and Family:</p> <p>I received a letter from Gain Clemons, written to my oldest son John B. Lampton at Frankfort, where he lives, which letter he sent to me at this place which letter gives us great satisfaction indeed to hear you</p>	<p>where you was for the Lord knows how long. I want you to answer this, on the receipt of it, and let me know in the first place all about the health of yourself and family, and the health of all your children and all of their children, then your business, where all your children are living and what they are following, how many you have sons, and how many daughters, and how many married, and how many grandchildren, and where they all live as near as you can tell. We have only four children living, all married but Robert the youngest, and he is thirty years old and lives with us, eight grandchildren. I have my health very well indeed for a man of my age, but I feel as able to attend to business, as I ever did. It would give me more pleasure to see you and Dranner, than any two people in this world. John and his wife, you four, I had rather see with you before I leave this world and I hope I will see</p>
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were all well and to hear where you lived. I have written to different places, to see if I could hear from you but this is the first satisfaction I have ever received about you, since I received your letter, and I am not able to say how long that has been, but a long time. Wharton. I am living about 14 miles from the Ohio River in Kentucky, on a road called Owingsville and Big Sandy Turnpike Road, where I expect to live as long as I live. I with William Robert and Jas. W. Riley, our grandson and a son of Polly. Our oldest daughter is engaged with to W. McCollough, who works in a iron furnace which employs myself, Robert as clerk and J. W. Riley as store-keeper, with McCollough as a guilman of the iron and laying in supplies for the establishment, as busy as can be. There is engaged as laborers to carry on the work 150 to 200 hands. William is one of the firm, but he is engaged at the iron business in the State of Ohio. Her husband was by the name of James A. Blomask, and has not been dead more than three months. Wharton, if I could get a letter from you, it would give us more satisfaction than to get one from any person in the world, as I have never heard from you, or knew

you all if we all should live till this winter coming. Susan joins with all the family in sending their love to you all. I will come to a close, by subscribing ourselves, your affectionate brother and sister till death, and may God bless you all in your undertakings, is our earnest prayer.

JAMES and SUSAN LAMPTON.

N. B. Since I wrote this letter, the mail has failed to come till this day.

Cabs for sale at McAfee's. (tf)

Dr. J. F. McLellan

DENTIST

Over Woolworth's Store

DR. M. G. KIRK

Osteopathic Physician

Hours: 9 a. m. to 12 m., 2 to

5 and 7 to 8 p. m.

Over Eisenstein's

There is much more you can read about this pioneer Carter County family if you want. If you Google Robert William Lampton a wealth of information can be accessed.

A search of our own Carter County Genealogy Research Site will yield many results concerning the Lampton's. There is a wonderful article on there written in 1942 by Jean Strother stating that Robert was born in Carter County but most other sources refute that.

For Mark Twin Genealogy including the Lampton family go here:

<http://www.genealogy.com/famousfolks/markt/index.htm>

Letter from William J. Lampton to Mark Twain

office of garrett, mc. dowell & co. pig iron. n.e. cor. 4th and washington ave.

st. louis, May 20th 1875

Sam'l. L. Clemens Esq

Hartford, Conn

Dear Sir

Honors like misfortunes never come singly, and I am another star (?) to add to your crown of glory—I am your cousin—at least, Jas Lampton Esq of this city says so, and I'm sure, Jas may be relied upon in matters genealogic. I am from Kentucky, and have lived west of the Mississippi about a year and a half & have known Cousin James since 3 weeks ago. I am book-keeper for the firm whose name stands at the head of this sheet, and the longer I keep books the more I feel that I have missed my calling and that “newspaper man” was inscribed upon the package of dust from which I was evolved. I've tried to get on some paper here, as reporter but have no influential acquaintances among the editors; when I heard that you were of like blood with myself I thought, “try again,” and your influence might be gained in my favor, with some of your publishing friends. I'm young & healthy, and not afraid of the disagreeable duties incidental to a first appearance as quill driver; besides my education & reading give me some confidence in the less unpleasant portions of the work. Don't think because I ante this that I'm impecunious, dead broke short of money or friends, & seeking to curry favor or funds for it is not so, but from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh & I'd like to hear from you. East, West, North, South, any-where; daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly anything.

I am very &c Yours

—W. J. Lampton—

care Garrett McDowell & Co—St L—Mo

William James Lampton (1851?–1917) was the grandson of James Lampton (1787–1865), one of Jane Clemens's seven paternal uncles. He was therefore Clemens's second cousin (and a first cousin once removed of James J. Lampton, the model for Colonel Sellers). James Lampton became wealthy from iron ore discovered on his Kentucky land, and his business passed to William's father, William Henry Lampton (1813–99). In 1873 William left Kentucky for St. Louis, where he took a position with Garrett, McDowell and Company, Commission Merchants and Dealers in Pig Iron. In 1876 he again wrote Clemens, proposing a visit, and was rebuffed: Clemens wrote on the envelope of his letter, “Declined to suffer the affliction of his visit” (Lampton to SLC, 26 June 76, CU-MARK). In 1877 Lampton succeeded in becoming a journalist by launching the Ashland (Kentucky) Weekly Review, with his father's money. Around that time he may have managed to meet Clemens and his family, as suggested by his close to an exultant letter of 18 February 1882, on the letter-head of the Steubenville (Ohio) Herald (CU-MARK):

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You will remember perhaps in 1876 when I was in St Louis keeping books I asked you to assist me in getting a place in a newspaper but you told me I'd better stick at what I was. But I didn't do it, and five years ago this month I went to Ky and started down so low as to publish a Republican paper in that state (Possibly you dont know just what sort of a job that was. I do—now) Then I went to Cincinnati & then here in 1879 & here I have succeeded in getting my name in lots of papers and my picture in several more and this week just 5 years from my first work on a newspaper I have been offered & accepted the position of City Editor of the Courier-Journal of Louisville without any solicitation or knowledge of it until the proposition was made. That's all. I feel like I am entitled to this crow for you were the first man I ever talked to in the newspaper business and I felt interested in you. No preventing Providence. I go to Louisville Mch 1st & if you ever come down that way, we will see if we cant find a fresh cork out of a bourbon bottle for you to smell at. . . . Remember me to Mrs Clemens and the little chicks.

Yours,

W. J. Lampton

The editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, Henry Watterson, of course recognized the name "Lampton," and may have known of William's family relationship to Clemens—and, more remotely, to himself. In later years Lampton wrote several books, as well as humorous poems he called "yawps," which were printed in the New York Sun and collected in *Yawps and Other Things* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, ca. 1900) (Selby, 15, 30, 112; Lampton 1990).

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W. J. LAMPTON DIES; 'POET OF THE PEOPLE'

Satirical and Humorous Writer
on Topics of the Day Ex-
pires Suddenly at 58.

WAS A KENTUCKY COLONEL

Father of "Yawp" School of Verse
of Which "The American Eagle
Speaks" is an Early Example.

Colonel William James Lampton, journalist, who once described himself as "the plain poet of the people," died yesterday at the French Y. M. C. A., 109 West Fifty-fourth Street, where he made his home while in this city. Colonel Lampton had apparently been in good health on Tuesday night though he had complained of feeling ill before he retired. He was best known in this city as a contributor of satirical verse on current topics to the daily newspapers, including THE NEW YORK TIMES,

The New York Tribune, The New York Sun, and The New York World, though



Colonel W. J. Lampton.

many of his articles and verse appeared in the monthly magazines.

Colonel Lampton made hundreds of friends in this city, as it was his custom to make the acquaintance of lonely persons, shopkeepers in the neighborhood of his bachelor quarters who were not fortunate in their business dealings as well as those who were, for the purpose of brightening their spirits with his pleasantries, a self-imposed task, it is related, which rarely met with ill-success. His poetry as well bore the imprint of his disposition, his satire being written in humorous vein on topics of the day.

Colonel Lampton was born in Lawrence County, Ohio, fifty-eight years ago, the son of William H. and Elinor Fairfax Miller Lampton, both of whom were natives of Kentucky. He was educated at academies in Kentucky and later attended Ohio Wesleyan University and Marietta College in Ohio. From the latter institution he received an honorary degree of A. M. in 1891.

His Newspaper Career.

His newspaper career commenced when he edited his own newspaper, a small Republican daily in Ashland, Ky., from 1877 to 1878. Later he became a reporter on The Cincinnati Times and a paragrapher for the Steubenville (Ohio) Herald. He was a staff writer on The Critic and Evening Star of Washington

and The Louisville Courier Journal and editor of The Cincinnati Merchant Traveler. It was while he was with The Washington Evening Star that he originated the "Shooting Stars" department of that publication. He afterward joined the staff of The Detroit Free Press.

In 1915 Colonel Lampton put forward his claim as the father of the "yawp," or vers libre, as eighteen years before this peculiar form of verse acquired such a vogue The New York Sun editorially had announced that Colonel Lampton was the father of the new school of poetry. He asserted that he commenced writing verse in the style of the "yawp" in 1890, while a member of the staff of The Washington Star. The "American Eagle Speaks" notably, was written when the United States conducted diplomatic correspondence with Italy as the result of the killing of Chief of Police Hennessey of New Orleans by the Mafia.

"I wrote what I thought the American Eagle would say on such an occasion, and particularly how it would scream," said Colonel Lampton. "No ordinary conventional form of verse had the scream measure and I chose my own means of effecting this result in print. When I showed my scream verse, extremely free verse it was, too, to the editor of The Star he fairly gasped, and then slowly shook his head, and said that, while I had the correct sentiment, he could not imperil the literary reputation of the paper by printing any crazy-quilt poetry like that.

"American Eagle" Spreads.

"The scream went into my desk, instead of into the paper, because I declined to edit any matter submitted by the American Eagle. The verse lay in my drawer for several days, until it occurred to me that Charles A. Dana was the man who did not wait on conventions, literary or otherwise, and I hurried over to him without introduction. I had never written anything for The Sun, and had grave doubts about making a first attempt with such violence, but it was that or nothing, and Sunward it went. Mr. Dana let it go straight, without any editing, and that settled the business. The Tribune copied it the next day, and the Washington papers, excepting The Star, took it up, and in a very short time it had spread from Maine to California, some of the papers even festooning it with flags and some with eagles."

Colonel Lampton was the author of several volumes, including "Yawps and Other Things," "Confessions of a Husband," "The Trolley Car and the Lady," "Mrs. Brown's Opinions," "Judge Waxem's Pocket Book of Politics," and "Tame Animals I Have Known." In March, 1910, he was appointed Colonel and Aide de Camp on the staff of Governor John W. Willson of Kentucky.

It was said that Colonel Lampton was a cousin of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) on his mother's side, it being understood that Clemens's mother and Colonel Lampton's grandmother were first or second cousins.

Colonel Lampton was a charter member of the Friars Club, a member of the Authors' League, and the Kentucky Society.

A funeral service will be held at the French Y. M. C. A. tonight by the Rev. Dr. James Palmer of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Colonel Lampton's body will be sent to Mrs. A. H. Sympton, his sister and only surviving relative, of Louisville, Ky., where it will be buried.

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William J. Lampton is buried at the Winchester Cemetery

<http://www.kyinfofolk.com/clark/misc/winchester.htm>