

Letter from Ellen Cook Whitehurst to William White Griffin, ca. 1930

[This verbatim transcription was created by the staff of the Southern Historical Collection, UNC Chapel Hill, in December 2015. Researchers should note that the transcription may contain errors or typos, so the original manuscript should be consulted to determine the exact text. In some cases, we were uncertain about an individual word, so those cases were left in brackets with a question mark with our best guess for the word, (ex., [fellores?]). Researchers are also urged to use the "Key to Individuals" document that accompanies this transcription, which provides helpful information about individuals mentioned in the text (birth and death dates, nicknames, and actual names). Also, we have attempted to reflect the punctuation and line breaks as they appear in the original document.]

[cover letter, recto]

Dear Mr. William,

Well I guess you think I forgot, but
I misplace your address. Now I hope you
can read what I writen and that
it is what you want of curs if I could
tell you are eving answer you question
better iff I talk with you now if I have
maid your Grate Grandmother harsh
I did not meane to fore I would not
have one of Miss Minnie children
think hard of her for her grate love
fore her rouse the [fellores?] of the family
I ofton wish to defend her when I hear
her condem by the family She was just
strong love with those she love [eagrly?] with

a strong hate for those she hated
as I stood with you by your mother
and dear little Camilla casket & I saw much
in you that reminded me of that stronge
woman well I truly hope that life
still hole a brighter day for you
and that I may see you with a

[cover letter, verso]

wife I think you owe your life of
duty that much love as a reward
Miss Lizzie wrote me such a
nice letter she sem so happy I
think it so wise in her I was afrade
she settle down afrade she be a
nother Miss Sack she realy seme
please at her worke Mrs Matte
letter was a little sad I wrote her
when she com to New Yourk to take
3-5 St Nicholas bust down by the
catherald and she could get
right off wher I live 742 St Nicholas Ave
Apt 11 so you do likwis when you
are up this way.

God bless you

Ellen

[Page 1]

My ancestors were free born my Grandmother
was born on the Eastern shore of Maryland
her grandmother was a full blooded
Indian negro father her father worked
for a Mr Scribner of Baltimore who
wife bore children faster than she had
strength to nurse them he finally
persuaded my Grand Mother to bring
his family to Baltimore so his wife
might be wet nurse to his children
with the solemn promise that
he would make no attempt to place
them in bondage no sooner had
they settled in Baltimore then he sought
to hold them the law step in send
the older children back to the
Eastern Shore My Grandmother and
one sister were left with the mother
who soon died of a broken heart
my Grandmother was given to the
lady who raised me
she was then 2 years
old and my Aunt was

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given to his Brother Mr Colombus

Cook Thus they parted to meet

after 40 years this informasion I

got frome Mrs Emily Cook who

allso raise me years laiter

My Mother was born when my Grandmother

was a bout 19 her Father was white

like her Mother I was born when

my Mother was a mear chile my

Father was white and let me

say here he the only white man

I hate I enherete his talent

deprive of and Edocasin his wiles

decend on my boyes yes that is a

weeke word fore the man whose

bloode run in my veins my

first recolecsion is of a lone woman

with a face of an Angle who

taugh me the Aposele Creed

she was the younges liven Daughter

of the woman that raise my Grandmother

my Mother had grown up with her

thare wasa 3 weeks differn in thar

birth three months in thar dieth

my nex recolecsion was holden

on my Grandmother skirts and

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begen to touch that Angle woman
baby the mother had past to the
land of rest we storme and rush
fore the house as the Northern
Calvery shot write and lef
through the street for this was
wore time an had we lef our
ole home with the Mistres sitten
on top of wagon and my Grandmother
with the family silver and
jewels tied in bag under her
close run from our one home
town when Ronoke fell only
to be lock in house proper
strong window shutters as the
troops past the dore and
burnt Tarboro brige we soon
lef Tarboro and went to Oxford
where my own Mother sone
past to the grate beyond
and you may how bitter the
people of that town was towards
the negro but it is said to ther

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credied thar ware fare les half
white children thar pastor
refuse to let a negro go to the
grave in there hearse and
it was only through the consent
of Rev Vaughan to ride on the
hearse and my Mother being a
maid in his house that my
Mother body was aloud to be
carred to the negro publick
grave the first negro to be
alowed that hounor after her death
My Grandmother emetly married a dark
man young enough to be her son This
marriage Mrs Cook bitterly fought aganst
~~alodern~~ my Grandmother paide lettle
head to enny Advice fore she had a
stubirn will of her own and when Mrs
Cook temper and her will clash thor
was all way a storme an though thay
had a strong love for each othere
thay found it imposoble to live together
The wore had close and we start back
home some of the way in [Tabaca?] or covert
wagon a small way on core and
finely reach home in a stage coutge

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that run from Norfolk to E City were
soon my Grandmother and her husband
decide that would leav the family
and nothing could stop them from
taken me a long but he soon becom
verry hatfull to me resentfull of my
light skin but before I speek ill of him
let me say the most book learnin I recal
he tought me as he had been tought
to read write and spell during the wore
by his young master (Mr Enock Lorne)
so when he was unkind I yet bless him
for that when my Grandmother worke
I had food yet ofton I had none those
day I was not alow to go to the ole
home I neve will forget the last Christmas
I was with them Thay had quorell all
night before and each want the other
to give in sudly My Grandmother
tole me go till Mrs Mary Ann please
give me something to Eate with teares
stream frome her eyes she fed me
and sent her a large bundell it was
the last time I ever saw her ere
the New Year burst a pon this her

pure spiret had flow to the God
that gav in years to com I was ofton

[Reverse Page]

~~he had me sit down beside him
now Ellen he said I feale it my duty to
explane Mrs Cook condision to tell you
part of the hard task before you and
lean you to decide~~

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to be maide to her Angle Chile lef behine
in a bout 3 mounth she and Silas battle
over me when one day she tole me
to get redy to go with her from the
pasige I had herd him say take back
to your white foulks but she sor d nott
to me only com go with me she tied my
few close in a bundell and I start life one
after a laps of 2 years with the white foulks
back to the woman that raise her get
to the ole hom ~~Urile~~ whar I was borne
the family consite then of Mrs Cook
Miss Lizzie the Chile of the Daugher
who who my mother was maide and
the outhar Chile who mother had given
me food that Christmas before those
children ware to be my care not engh
older to be thor nurse when we got to the
house it was a bout 7 oclock a coule
sawry day my Grandmother and Mrs
Cook meeting was eny thing but
plesen she fortuly refuse to lisen
to her pleading that she toke

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me after my Grandmother had told her
of my hard life an Miss Lizzie a saint
on earth and Mr Tom Cook who was my
Grandfather long began and she
had tole my Grandmother all her
misddee she finely consent that I might
stay that night later on on condision
that I be bound to her not a very easy
thing to get don those dayes she toke
me for good I eate a big supper laid
down and went to sleep thus begon my
strang life raise with white a moving
white and only when a party was
given ore strange company was
I remind of my negro bloud well the
bining process must be atend to first
The Fredoman Burrau must investogat
and see iff thor was no way fore
me to be surporte then being bound
to a white family fore you know
at the tim thor wore a regment of
Northern soulders storon thore and
The Freedman Beuro duty was to

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see that no negro was token advantage
of my Grandmother might have sworn
to my Father and call befor him fore
sorport ensted of bind me out she
thank God refuse I must say I was
willing som proment man must
stand fore Mrs Cook finely after all
the wire pulling in the march
Court it was settle I was to be fed
18 mounth schooling an clouth
not to be whipe and you con
amagen that a dance I led her
as a Child when I knew she could
not whip me her hate was so bitter
aganst the northern teacher or as
she call them Yanky Schoole morne
that she postve refuse to let me go to
the school tought by them and thore
wore no other fore coulord she stord
to teach me her self no easy task
with her hot temper and my stoborn
desposion we made a bout 3 mounth
at it when one night over the

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spelling of the word because she
pitch the Blue book speller striken
me on the nose maken it bleed
worke her self up in one of her
[wromes?] nearves atack wich I learn
year late wor realy violent fits of temper
had she a loued Miss Lizzie to do the
teachen my life would have been
quite different in a few mounth later
thay sent collored teachers from the
north a new school hous was built
among the souners that held out the
hand of frendship was Mr Frank
Vaugh who was the Lawer who stood
sponces fore her token me he insited
that I be sent to schoole Miss Sophia
Mortan beg and trye to show her
the injustice being don me by
depriven me of an edcosion those
2 friends hav allwas stoof as the
bright sunlight in my otherwise
dark childhood with Miss Lizzie
persuasion I finely got to schoole

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I played with the children and then
Girl friend and only when a party was
given was I remind that I was colored
a few year ago I meet one of those
Girl now a grandmother she call me
to her and said to her Daughter there
Ellen a turning to me she said
I never could tell her of my childhood
without bring you in I was not aloud
to go in the kitchen but eat
alone in the dining room after
the family had finish so my life
has been spent on the border line
I suppose I stood in the same light
that the maids did before the
wore between the states now I
would not have you think she
treat me badly or unkind all the
time for from it now she had her
own peculiar way of punishing me
she could not whip me a cord
to law which I soon found out if I was
very good I could have a half hour

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out with ~~I side~~ colored people she pick
out a privalg I seldom earne I was allowed
to go to the colored Sunday schoole
but being one of those people that cotch
every diese I begun by bring hom the
mumps and the two Gran Children had
it very bad I now stop worken then
I cought the whopan cough and
the older her best lov like to pas
with it I was then warn that the
nex diese I brought from that s s
I go no more but date was aganst
me I soone brought bock the measel
I was not very sick but the younger
girle was very ill and I was remind
daley that if she died I had kill her
so ended my contack with my people
untill I was ner 16 ~~and we~~ she give
and made me good close but her creed
was no stile all must be mad one
way my grate trouble was when
when she and my Grandmother
will clash over me my Grandmother

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had decide that I should wore Earrings
she wood bore the hole pas the silk
stran through and on time even got
the earing in when I get home she emely
pull them out it was only a mercifull
God that keep me frome blood poisen
as no fewer then they had 6 battle over
my ~~years~~ ears so my childhood past I allways
had a streem of pittty fore her after one
of hers and my battle she push one from
her saying you are nothing like Nancy
but all of your devlish Father she
allways spoke kindly of my mother I
often wondore if it was the tie of blood
her favrt son Tom was my mother
Father I was now near 18 her mine
was dreflen the Doctor call it sofning
of the brane I had a chance to go
to St Augsten to schoole after a long
sad tolk with Dear Miss Eliza who said
she take the burden on her shoulder
I went to see our Doctor after
telling him of my loning fore schoole

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He set down S beside of me now Ellen
he said I am goin to put Mrs Cook case
before you and leave you to decide
fore your self she will nead consent
wotching nursing humorn as a chile
no loving person will beare with her
Miss Eliza ~~pride~~ will not be able to tend
her by her self and and older Person
canot fill you place my bondage was
up but could I leav the woman that
had given me shelter and food when
no one else wont me I maide the
sacrific I have never regret it the
task was heavy now she only thought of
Miss Minnie as her own Daughter and
what love this strong woman give
her but eving her must be hom befor
sundown The Methodes sexton rung
the Church bell right in front of
her window when he leane our to
pull the rope he stop to talk she
order me to go a cross and tell
Jacob stop talkin of course I dore
not tell Uncle Jacob to stop talken

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neither would I dare refuse to go so I
walk down the street pas the Church
and come back and tell he said he
wont do it a gane she never seme to
realise that the wore had close
as the only time I got a leav of Absens
a young man that she knew I
was to marry when she was her self
and she happen to like was to be marred
in Edenton why she consent to let me
go up to the marrige I never quite under
only she thought I was to be the bride
but she did when I got back after 3
day thay tole me she crye all the time
I was gon but the first thing she said
to me was well Ellen I knew you be
glad to get back I guss the Yankees
did not treat you so good I guss you
behav now our grates trouble was
to keep her from tell the nebor that we
would not giv her enny thing to eate
but as the neabor at that time was
ole Ariscrat they help us out by
not belven my house of refuse when
she get mad and drove me a way
was the garet but I never could

bear to go up thor in the dark

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fore it was a leagen weath true
are fals that som of the Georg Boys
sade had died up thar during the
wore so I get my hat an come
up the back stips and beg her to
let me com back It was my duty
to help her down steps to take her
afternoon ride The steps had a
bend are narrow near the top she
took a noason that I was going to
push her down so she get me in the
cornor and squse me a ganst the
wall untill her temper was spent then
sit in the steps calling me at the tope of
her voice to put her in the carrege
she allways spoke of young collord
men as Young American one of her
Lady friend had a Daughter ~~no sooner~~
that was consird to hav quite a fine voice but
fore som unknow reson she seme
to have a specoll dislike to the Girle
so no sooner then the Lady would
get seat especly if thor was outhere
company in the room she ask how

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is your daughter and when the Mother
told she emelly say you must be mistaken
I shure she all is ten years older then
that and it such a pittty you didn't
have her voice Cutbrvate I had a very
bad habit of liken to be the first to tell
every thing first so she ofton would hole
me by my dress to keep me from meeting
Miss Eliza dow stores to tell something
that had happen duran her absent
I am sorrow to say she nevr broke me
fore the habbet still cling to me
After she grew two old no alind Church
I stay with her Sunday morning Mrs Eliza
the afternoon fore we never lef her alone
with the Grandchildren her favoret
task was to look over her Beaurow
drawrs she allwas keep at lease 3 dozen
hanchef a mong them wor 6 verry
exspence an she allwas clam after each
count that I had stole 4 fore hours she
rage untill her strength give out in
that draw she keep one tresure that
she price It was a lock her mother hare

[page 15, verso]

Evelyn Lang

December 11, 1930

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her mother haire and som letters
thore verry touch would exite her
and she put her hand on my arm
and say Ellen I found my hancchefe
how ofton I thought had her Mothr
been alowed to raise her how diffrn
she would have been she was just
but nev forgive no person that did
enny thing for her ever went unpaid
I hav ofton wondor what would
have been the faite of that sone
that had caus her so many hart
ack had she know in his maid
hase he had burnt that lock of
haire and papers thor was much
good in that strange misunderstood
woman I fount her the week befor
she past to the grate beyon to stand
by Miss Eliza Minnie an Mattie she past
a way a lone in the room with me
she had much to beare I believe she
rest thooe I was to serve I know rest
I feale my duty was don and

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my reward has been the love of
all I am satisfide when I think
of the love your Angle Mothr and
Miss Mattie give me and wich I beleve
you all give me I feall my sacrifce
was grate but my reward has
been grater