Letter from John W. H. Baker to Julia Ann Baker, 1854 Jul. 5

John W. H. Baker

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My Dear Wife

It is with a heart full of grief and eyes filled with tears that I undertake to pen a few of my thoughts this evening, after having this afternoon received the very painful intelligence of my dearly beloved Brother Oliver's death. Oh! how sad! I can scarcely bring my mind to the reality of so distressing a fact. He was with me so recently in all the flush and vigor of health and enjoying himself in active life and business. now that he should have passed through all the scenes of sickness most distressing, with his wife and his Father, Mother and relatives about him, at times indulging hopes of his recovery and again loosing them, watching carefully every symptom and eventually losing all hope that their anticipated happiness would be realized, that he should have suffered the pangs of death, and for the space of five weeks have been buried beneath the cold, cold earth, I say I can hardly comprehend this to be a reality. But it is even so, and he to whom I was so much attached is gone forever, no more to meet me on earth! Oh, my departed brother would that I might have been with you to have given my consoling aid to you in your last sickness. That I might have given you a parting look, one touch of sympathetic kindness. but no, this boon could not be given, and it remains for me in this far off land to mourn alone and in the land of strangers to shed my tears of sorrow for the afflictive dispensation of Providence. Although alone, I have many friends who were well acquainted with Oliver here to lend a word of sympathy and give me consolation in my time of trouble and affliction. I can write no more this night but must retire to bed and compose myself for rest. and with a prayer that the ever-watchfull eye of the Ruler and Governor of all things would spare and us/all of ours and out relatives to meet again on earth I bid you a God be with you. So good night.
July 6th. I have been feeling quite anxious to receive the letter which I received yesterday and although I had fears that sad news might be in its contents I indulged strong hopes that I might hear of his recovery. Cousin John Storrs was of the same opinion of myself or I might say had the same fears and we both talked the matter of his sickness over thinking it possible that our next news would be of his death. There are so many deaths occurring from disease contracted in the journey to and from California that it may well be termed a perilous undertaking to make the voyage either way. Several of Oliver's intimate friends have been in today and spoken to me of him, and I am fully convinced that there was no man in this section of country who held a better reputation and was looked to with more esteem than Oliver was. I was well aware of the good opinion of all those who did business with him, and I say with truth that I have known no man in California with so many true friends as he had.

But I ask what are friends? or what is money? compared with life and health they are nothing. Oh! that my dear brother could have lived to have given you all something of his experience in this country. Although he had many hardships in his employment, he seemed to enjoy himself and was quite healthy. I do not know of his being unwell but once since my arrival in the country, and at that time I believe I wrote you concerning it. the only difficulty at that time was an attack of diarrhea from which he recovered in a few days.

I feel quite anxious to hear the whole of the circumstances connected with his disease and death, and whether he was at any time free from the wandering state of mind long enough to converse with his wife or the friends about him, relative to his dying. I would like to know whether he said anything in relation to his business matters. How much money did he carry home with him? I do not know myself as I never asked him how much he had after settling his affairs
here. I suppose he collected most of the debts which he considered available before he left although he had considerable of an amount due in poor debts. I suppose he made some arrangement with John Storrs to collect what amount he could of the debts. But I think he had made no collections from the fact that hardly any kind of debts are collectable in this country without an expensive suit at law if the persons owing choose not to pay. I suppose I shall hear all the next mail, which is due the next Steamer, next week.

The weather here is now excessively hot, the thermometer ranging in the shade about 100 and up to 108 in the hottest part of the day. Such weather I never before experienced. Still it is not so depressing as the heat of the N. E. States. I am quite well and never was more healthy than at present. But we know not how long such a condition of things may prevail, but with a sincere hope that it may continue I console myself. I must say that I have felt quite homesick since I heard such sad news, but I upon reflection cannot think it best for me to go home at present for I could not dispose of my property so as to go with any amount of funds more than a little in advance of my passage money. I can make no promise as yet as to the time I may remain here, but have made up my mind to the matter of coming so soon as I am satisfied I can return in comfortable circumstances.

My business is rather light but still much better than I could do in that part of the country. I sent you word to send my library and some other things which I wished, but under the circumstances I would rather you would not send me anything as I have enough to do me at present and as to those books I can get along without them for the time that I shall be likely to remain here. I would like to know all about the changes going on at Meriden & if any, both in regard to the people and the place. As you wrote me some time since that you
were frequently asked if you thought I could be persuaded to locate at Meriden again. I do not know but that I might do so without much persuasion for I know of no other region where the people and the place suit me better, (with the exception of a few of the former) than Meriden and its inhabitants. I believe I can do a business in the neighborhood of M. which will support me and my family comfortable if I can only locate myself in a comfortable home of my own without being in debt but to become indebted in N. H. even to the small amount of a few hundred dollars it gives a man a poor prospect of maintaining himself and paying his honest debts. When I think of that one thing I am resolved not to return untill I have enough to purchase a good location in Meriden or some other place which shall suit me. I saw in a paper which I received from D. K. Bryant a Card published in the Vermont Journal of a Physician who had located at Plainfield Plain. I would like to know whether father sold his place to him or whether he had anything to do with his locating there. Does father have a good share of business in Windsor? If he does and is content to remain there untill I return I may choose to locate there myself. Tell him to do all he can to retain his business. But not to say anything of my ever saying a thing of locating there myself.

July 12th. The weather this P. M. is a little more comfortable although quite "hot" yet. The thermometer is 100 in the shade today. We have a few light fleecy clouds in the sky this P. M. and by slightly obscuring the rays of the sun we are relieved of the oppressive heat which we have had for more than a week past. I do not think that I have seen a cloud in the sky for more than three weeks before today, and you can hardly imagine the comfort of seeing so common a thing as a cloud in this land of drought. We shall probably have some two months more of hot weather as we have had for one month past upon an average.
After which time we have a fine climate--I am quite healthy and am getting quite fleshy--am feeling my flesh may become bothersome, but never enjoyed better health in my life.

I want you should mention in your letters whether you receive my letters regularly, and the receipt of all my remittances. How do you fancy my present to yourself and the children? (I refer to the miniature) I send the children a little present in this letter, a California quarter dollar for Laura Maria and a specimen of quartz gold for Fred--they must keep them--

With these few lines and while I think of the sad death of a brother, and the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, I wish you to give my consoling sympathy to Sister Sophia telling her that while she mourns a husband and protector I mourn the loss of a kind and much beloved brother, but that it may all result in a mutual benefit in regard to our future well being is the desire of my heart. And while we look to God for consolation may it cause us to live lives more in accordance with His wish. Now my dear wife I bid you and my beloved children another written farewell until I may be allowed to write you again from my far-distant abode--hoping that God in his Providence may kindly permit us our health and all the comforts necessary for us and eventually restore us to enjoy each other's presence together here upon earth. With these hopes and wishes I subscribe myself

Mrs. Julia Ann Baker
Meridan, N. H.

Sealing wax a small bit that held gold.