

## 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 Columbus

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  
they 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 speak 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 regiment 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

[Page 9B]

I played with the children and thor  
Girle friend and only when a party was  
given was I remind that I was collored  
a few year a go I meet one of those  
Girle now a grandmother she call me  
to her and said to her Daughter thore  
Ellen a turning to me she said  
I never could tell her of my chilhood  
without bring you in I was not aloud  
to go in the kitchen but eate  
alone in the dining room after  
the family had finish so my life  
has been spent on the border line  
I sopose I stood in the same light  
that the maids did befor the  
wore betwen the states now I  
would not have you think she  
treat me badly or uncine all the  
time fore from it now she had her  
own peculiar way of punishing me  
she could not whip me a corden  
to law wich I soon found out if I was  
verry good I could hav a halfe 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 Earings  
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