

As part of the upcoming North Country Courtship class, I am enclosing five letters which were part of the collection. While the bulk of the correspondence is comprised of letters from Henry Clark of Richville to Lucelia Arvilla Mills of Rensselaer Falls, there are also letters included from her sister, A.J. Mills (and their mother), her school teacher friend from Pitcairn, and Cousin Julia, among others. You will also find one letter, the only letter written by Lucelia "Arvilla" Mills in the collection, allowing Henry to begin a correspondence with her. These letters are just a few of seventy in the collection, but they will give a sampling of what can be found within. Please take the time to read them, as I would like to know what you would have chosen to research if this project had been yours to do. If you have any questions or would like to discuss things that interest you, I would like to hear about that, as well.

Thank you,

Tabitha Brown

## A. J. Mills to Arvilla, 22 October 1868

Rensselaer Falls

Dear Sister

I received your welcome letter  
and have just sat my self  
down to answer it. we have  
got your dress all done and  
reddy to send. When I take  
this to the post office I shall  
take that to the depot.<sup>1</sup> you  
will get it friday or saturday  
as to the stuf to make a  
hat<sup>2</sup> of Mrs. Gale<sup>3</sup> said that  
they wore velvet now and  
so I got green velvet if  
there is any left save it  
and bring it home for  
me. we are having quite  
a “snow storm” here, dose it  
snow there. you will find  
some caraway<sup>4</sup> in the pocket  
of your dress. we put some  
pieces of your dress in so  
if you make a hole in it  
you can mend it. We also  
send you the music, and the words for

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<sup>1</sup> Rensselaer Falls was a stop on the Rome, Watertown, Ogdensburg Railroad line.

<sup>2</sup> Having a decent hat was likely more than an appreciation for aesthetics, but to give the appearance of a lady, thereby representing the family as one of respectable status. Author Georgine deCourtais shares this insight on mid-Victorian era hats: “The importance of suitable headwear for any woman who wished to appear a “lady” was shown by the fact that material for three bonnets and a hat with trimmings were together the second most expensive item in the yearly budget.” While DeCourtais writes about Englishwomen’s hats, we can see by the debt that the American Mills’ family went into for the want of a hat, the hat investment was important on this side of the Atlantic, as well. Georgine deCourtais, *Women’s Hats, Headresses and Hairstyles* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006) 130.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Emeline M. Gale, 110 State Street, Ogdensburg, N.Y., is listed under Milliners and Millinery in the *Gazetteer and Business Directory of St. Lawrence County, N.Y. for 1873-4*. Hamilton Child, compiler, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of St. Lawrence County, N.Y. for 1873-4* (Syracuse: Hamilton Child, 1873), 419.

<sup>4</sup> Though it is not disclosed why caraway was placed in the pocket of Arvilla’s dress, according to *A Modern Herbal*, by Maud Grieve and published in 1931, caraway had been employed as a carminative, which relieves flatulence, and also as a flavoring agent. Grieve also notes folklore in which caraway would thwart theft of whatever object contained the caraway. Grieve’s book can be accessed electronically at botanical.com via <https://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/c/carawa20.html>.

“Annie darling<sup>5</sup>” & my scarf.  
Ma says “you must have  
your hat trimmed as plain and  
cheep as possible and have it  
decent” have you got the  
letter yet that had the ~~mony~~  
money in it to get you a  
book with ~~yet~~ maby there  
is a letter in the office for  
me now from you. for  
I havent bin to the P.O for  
some time. Ma says, she wants  
to know just how much to send  
you this from your sister

AJ Mills<sup>6</sup>

Lucelia: I want you to  
get your hat done just as  
economical as possible.  
for our money is scarce  
I had to run into debt to  
get the velvet. and dont  
know when I can pay  
it. Your term<sup>7</sup> is nearly  
half out. & I want you  
to put in and learn with  
all your might for you

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<sup>5</sup> “Annie Darling” was a popular song composed by J.H. McNaughton and published by William A. Pond and Company in 1859. The sheet music can be found on the website babeltrust.org at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015088982882?urlappend=%3Bseq=1>. *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* from 1860 advertised the works of J. H. McNaughton, the composer of “Annie Darling,” as well as the going price for the sheet music, which was twenty-five cents a title. J. Starr Holloway. “Our Music,” *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, 1860. 84.

- <sup>6</sup> A. J. Mills was the only sister of Arvilla Lucelia Mills. According to the 1870 Census, she is 16 years old and is listed as “at school.” The spelling of her name, according to family records is either Ascha Jenne or Achsa Jenne. According to Find A Grave website, citing South Russell Cemetery in South Russell, N.Y., she is buried under the name of Achsa Jane Mills Bancroft and was born in 4 Dec 1853 and died in 20 Jun 1922. She is referred to as Jennie in the letter collection. The origin of the name Achsa is Hebrew. In the Bible, through the genealogy of Judah, Achsah is the daughter of Caleb. O'Brien, Julia M. "Achsa: Bible." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 27 February 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on April 3, 2020) <<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/achsah-bible>>.

<sup>7</sup> It is likely she attended the Wesleyan Seminary in Gouverneur. As Town of De Kalb, N. Y. Historian Bryan Thompson stated: “The Gouverneur Wesleyan seminary was the go to school for upper class people in the county before the Civil war. It did not matter what your religion.” When the seminary closed, it gave the building to Gouverneur as a high school.

This information is from an email from Thompson dated 4/22/2020.

will have to come home at  
the end of the term.  
If your dress doesnt fit  
you need not wear it unless  
you choose to.

your mother<sup>8</sup>

W Write Soon

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Envelope is addressed to “Lucelia A Mills, Gouverneur, N.Y. Care of Mr. G. Burt.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lucelia Arvilla’s mother was Jane Aldous Mills. In the 1870 Census, Jane Mills is listed as 48 years of age and having the occupation of keeping house; she is married to Canadian-born John R. Mills, who is 45 years of age in 1870 and works as a blacksmith. His real estate value is 1,000.00 and his personal value is 500.00. According to family records they were married in 1851.

<sup>9</sup> “Mr. George W. Burt” and “Mrs. George W. Burt” are listed under Milliners and Millinery in the Richville, De Kalb, area of St. Lawrence County. Child, *Gazetteer SLC*, 419.

[E??a] to Arvilla, 12 June 1870

Pitcairn<sup>1</sup>

Dear Friend

It is now past noon I  
have got my dinner eaten the  
scholars are at play so I thought  
I would write you I am getting  
along nicely in my school have  
24 scholars 8 of them are not 6 yrs  
old just so you can imagine how  
large they are I like the school  
very much this is the 6th week I have  
taught 8 more and then I am done  
I have not been lonesome any yet  
but enjoy myselfe nicely think some  
of going to hear an Advent Minister  
preach to night to morrow night  
tho G.W.P. templar<sup>2</sup> lecture at  
the vilage I intend to go I can go  
to lodge here have been once I  
suppose our lodge<sup>3</sup> is suspended  
is it not am going over to John  
[Beers?] to night have been there twice  
have got some acquainted with those  
cousins of yours the girl was home  
when I was there last she is a  
good looking lady the oldest boys  
are young men made up my mind  
I [wont?] go for them thought the  
oldest has bought a place joining  
my brothers well how are all the

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<sup>1</sup> In 1870, the Town of Pitcairn contained 35,386 acres and had limited settlement with a population of 667. In 1872, Pitcairn had seven school districts employing seven teachers. The pupil number attending school was 201, though the average attendance was 107. The amount Pitcairn spent for school purposes in 1872 was \$1,699.95. Child, *Gazetteer SLC*, 180-xvii.

<sup>2</sup>“The International Independent Order of Good Templars, founded in Utica, NY in 1851 modeled its structure after that of Free Masonry. The organization always admitted both men and women with no racial distinctions. Their goal was the outright prohibition of all alcohol from society through political means.” Bryan Thompson, “Lips That Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine,” Historian’s Office, Town of De Kalb, N.Y., <http://www.dekalbnyhistorian.org/LocalHistoryArticles/LiquorLips/lips.html>.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1889 edition of *The Official Organ: Of the Independent Order of Good Templars, State of New York*, there were seventeen lodges in St. Lawrence County. When the writer refers to “our” lodge, it is my interpretation that she is referring to the lodge in Rensselaer Falls where she and letter recipient Arvilla must go together. The Rensselaer Falls Lodge, No. 51, I.O. of G.T. was organized and chartered in 1866. There were 77 members at the start of the last quarter in 1872, this in a village whose population in 1873 was 395. Child, *Gazetteer SLC*, 97.

folks at the falls<sup>4</sup> Mrs Vandelinda<sup>5</sup>  
 and the rest would like to hear  
 from them all. where are you  
 a going the fourth I am not  
 a going any where expect to be  
 a little lonesome then  
 it has been very sickly out here  
 Most every one have had the Measles<sup>6</sup>  
 they went very hard too I have  
 escaped so far  
 Went up to village and had my picture<sup>7</sup>  
 taken in a group of 5 each of  
 us had a picture I have pieced  
 a bed quilt since I came here  
 and knit some besides the visit  
 -ing I think is doing pretty well  
 I am at my boarding place only  
 four night in a week sometimes  
 only 3 it has been very dry here  
 this spring it is cold enough to day  
 to have a fire  
 I have attended meetings every two  
 weeks Mr Wright a Congregational<sup>8</sup>  
 Minister preacher he was at your  
 Conference he said perhaps you  
 saw him very pleasant man  
 Jennie have you heard Freds  
 voice yet or has he forgotten  
 to holler at the gate

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to Rensselaer Falls, New York.

<sup>5</sup> In the 1870 census records for St. Lawrence County, Town of Canton, in which Rensselaer Falls is a village, Sylvia Vandelinda is listed as a 42-year-old woman whose occupation is keeping house and who has a real estate value of \$300.00. She has six children: Anna, Augustus, Arvilla, Ella, Ida, and Willen.

<sup>6</sup> Measles was initially reported in 1795 in the United States. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century death toll for the United States was six thousand people annually. It is highly infectious, as an individual with measles has the potential to infect up to 90% of people near them. The measles vaccine was not created and licensed until 1963. MPH@GW, the [online MPH program from the Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University](#).

<sup>7</sup> In these days, it was not difficult to get one's photograph taken in the North Country. Child's *Gazetteer and Business Directory for Saint Lawrence County 1873-4* lists fourteen photographers. De Kalb Town Historian Brian Thompson says that "Several had traveling studios that visited places like Richville on a regular basis. Having your image taken was a big deal."

Through the website, *Geni.com*, I was able to find photographs of Sarah Clark, as well as of Henry's father, Charles Parker Clark, and his mother, Eliza Ann Clark. Another photo features his brother, Whitman Clark, with his wife and children. The family photos are from Joanne Tomkinson's album. "Sarah Clark," *Geni*, last modified November 4, 2014, <https://www.geni.com/people/Sarah-Clark/5125761201600137585>. Child, *Gazetteer*, 422.

This quote from taken from an 4/22/2020 email from Mr. Thompson.

<sup>8</sup> Arvilla Mills and her suitor are ultimately wed by Congregational minister G. A. Rockwood of Rensselaer Falls, so when E??a speaks of "your Conference," I am assuming that of the two churches in Rensselaer Falls, Arvilla Mills attends the Congregational Church there.

I got come up with the other day  
I said I was going for your cousin  
or they said it for me and  
John up and told him I said so  
but I dont care much as long as it  
is not so I shall have to close for it  
is school time I have hurried so and  
my pen is so poor I doubt your  
reading this so will not tax you with  
more at presant will close hoping  
to hear from you soon I remain a  
Friend

[E??a]

Write Lucelia and excuse this poor letter and writen in haste  
Write Jennie

Written Thursday- noon

**Arvilla to Henry, 26 October 1870**

Rensselaer Falls

Mr Clark

I received your letter requesting a correspondence with me. I have no ~~of~~ objections if it will be a favor, to you. I believe we used to be friends, when you lived here. part of the time at least. but I should not have known you when you were out here, if I had not been told who you were. you are very much changed since last I saw you. I understand that you and Mr F[?] are coming out again in a few weeks Bert assured that you will be very wellcome when you do come. I wish that I had a card to send you in return for yours. but I have not. so I shall have to let my name at the close of this suffice. So Goodnight<sup>1</sup>

Arvilla Mills

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<sup>1</sup> This response to Henry Clark's request to correspond with Arvilla is somewhat terse and formal. Such a response would have been the correct one according to Florence Hartley's book, *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Handbook for the Use of the Lady in Polite Society*. Hartley advises that letters to gentlemen be "ceremonious and dignified." Florence Hartley, *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Handbook for the Use of the Lady in Polite Society* (Boston: G.W. Cotrell, 1860), 124.



## Julia Sheldon<sup>1</sup> to Arvilla, 1871-08-20

Passaic<sup>2</sup>

Dear Lucelia

In the first place  
while I think of it, What under the  
sun do you call that initial on  
your paper and envelope? All I can make out is A.

I received your letter Satur  
day afternoon and was glad to get

You say you have 12 to do  
the work for, but remember you  
have 8 to do it, while I have 6  
to do the work for and no one  
to help me either so now,

Last night I was frightened  
the door bell rang and I went to  
answer it and there stood Mr [ ? ]

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Sabrina Sheldon, born in Gouverneur on August 29, 1851, was the daughter of Arvilla's mother's sister, Martha Aldous Thompson Sheldon (b.1824) and Henry Sheldon (b. July 1814.) Charles Henry Browning, *Americans of Royal Descent* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Com, 1969), 464-65. It is no surprise that readers of the diary belonging to Julia's father, Henry Sheldon, will find that his daughter Julia (Arvilla's cousin and correspondent) traveled in a rail coach (the language is a clue to its horse-drawn predecessor) from her home in Gouverneur when going to help her Aunt Maggie in Passaic, N. J.<sup>[1]</sup> According to her father's March 20, 1871, diary entry, "Julia went this P.M. 3 oclock train to Passaic, dont know when she will return. May the Lord go with & keep her & bring her to love Him & walk in his ways. Lord Save & bless. Gave her cash \$16.00 & sent 22 1/2 lb Maple Sugar to Levi cost 16c pr lb +3.60."

Henry Sheldon's *Diary of Henry Sheldon*, transcribed by Frances Holst, can be accessed at the Gouverneur Museum website. The quote can be found at [https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d\\_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf](https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf).

Henry Sheldon penned his *Diary of Henry Sheldon*. It is transcribed by Frances Holst, and it can be accessed at the Gouverneur Museum website. This quote is from the 1871 diary which can be found at [https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d\\_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf](https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Julia Sheldon, daughter of Arvilla's mother's sister, Martha Aldous Sheldon, writes Arvilla from her Aunt Maggie and Uncle Levi Aldous' home in Passaic, New Jersey, a change from her home in Gouverneur, N. Y. She is staying to help her aunt with sewing. As Sarah Gordon maintains in her book, *"Make it Yourself": Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930*, home sewing "represented maternal responsibility, financial caution, feminine attractiveness, social connections and household respectability." Aunt Maggie had young children and was also expecting at this time, so Julia's assistance in the Aldous household and with its portrayal was undoubtedly helpful. Henry Sheldon penned his *Diary of Henry Sheldon*. It is transcribed by Frances Holst, and it can be accessed at the Gouverneur Museum website. This information is from the March 16, 1871 entry, which can be found at [https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d\\_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf](https://e9e35e1b-49e6-4965-94b4-d460ecfc73a7.filesusr.com/ugd/5c6e2d_3f73964ca03241ed9ad1f37743fb54ce.pdf).

With another young man from the city  
one of those that were over on the fourth

My Goodness are you coming to stay  
over Sunday almost thought out loud  
but I did not speak it

But as good luck would  
have it he had engaged rooms at the  
Acquackanonk<sup>3</sup> House<sup>4</sup> so he was only making a call.

They expect to go back to N.Y.  
the middle of this week and I  
will be so glad. Chris & [?] I mean

I took the news of your engagement sitting on the front piazza<sup>5</sup>  
steps with my lap full of bread,  
cookies, & crackers for I had just  
returned from the bakery<sup>6</sup> with things  
for tea and sat down to rest, and  
read my letters, and to cool off, for it  
was quite oven like, that day. The  
crackers did not roll off my lap  
or any thing unusual happen.

Mother always said that Lucelia  
would be getting married long before  
I ever had a beaux even,  
and so I was not quite as surprised as I might have been.

About your taking painting I  
do not like it at all for it makes me  
feel very jealous because I cant take them too.

If I had been in that others  
fellows place I would not have given  
my heart unless I knew it was wanted.

I hope you will have your  
picture taken soon for I would  
like to see it very much indeed.

I do not suppose he is any  
better looking than some of my acquaintances  
here. My you cant imagine how  
very stylish they are. Mr Montgomery

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<sup>3</sup> "In 1854 the village of Acquackanonk took the name of the river it bordered, Passaic." This is from page 1 of a paper written by Passaic City Historian, M.Auerbach, in 1998, titled "An overview of the History of the City of Passaic, New Jersey."

<sup>4</sup> The Acquackanonk House was a hotel on Railroad Avenue across from the depot in Passaic, New Jersey. Alfred Speer, *Speer's Passaic Directory for 1871* (Passaic: Alfred Speer, 1871), 62.

<sup>5</sup> Piazza can be used in reference to veranda or porch. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/piazza>.

<sup>6</sup> Four bakers existed in Passaic in 1871. The bakery advertisement for David Kirk's bakery was found on page 52 of *Speer's Passaic Directory 1871*.

wears pants that are so very flowing  
that they look almost like sailors  
breeches. O if they only knew how  
I laugh at their august<sup>7</sup> ways they  
would not think they were so very  
grand and impressive.

Why do you not tell your boarders  
name I should like to know  
how and why he calls you his sister.  
I do not think very much of hand  
some mens for they seldom have any  
brains.

Now for instance Ortega Thayer<sup>8</sup>  
I think he ought some brains

What nonsense I have been  
writing I am ashamed to send it to  
you and will close sending much  
love and good wishes to you all  
from your cousin

Julia Sheldon  
Write soon  
&  
often

On the envelope:  
I will be 20 the 29th of  
this month in 10 years I will be 30  
am I [?] old  
I do not like to have  
the writing show quite so plain  
This is the third time I have taken this piece  
of paper out of the envelope to put more on it  
Theodore<sup>9</sup> has gone as head brakeman on a freight train.

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<sup>7</sup> impressive: [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/august\\_1?q=august](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/august_1?q=august).

<sup>8</sup> Per the 1870 census schedule for Saint Lawrence County, Ortega Thayer is a 24-year-old drayman whose personal value is \$1,000. He lives at home with his parents, Thomas M. (retired cabinetmaker) and Melinda, both age 56, in Gouverneur, New York. Thomas' real estate value is value is \$5,000. And his personal value is \$1,000. According to Webster's 1828 Dictionary, a drayman is "a man who attends a dray." A dray is defined as a "low cart or carriage on wheels, drawn by a horse." Webster, *American Dictionary*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore B. Sheldon was Julia's brother. He was born June 28, 1854, in Gouverneur, N.Y. He ended up living in Columbus, Ohio. Charles Henry Browning, *Americans of Royal Descent*, 465.

## Henry to Arvilla, 1871 July 10

Richville

Dear Friend

Words cannot  
express the joy and plesier that I  
expearienced this evening in receiving  
a letter from one that I beleve  
to be a dear Friend much more  
was I supprised to see the face of  
that friend which was altogether  
unexpected but still I was glad  
to see it. Arvilla what do you ~~meen~~  
mean by asking me if I wer  
joecking. dont think so for it is  
true can you doubt my word  
I trust you will not for if I  
know my own hart and I think  
I do that all I say is true You  
asked me when I was coming down  
I dont know when I shall come  
again for it is very buisy times  
with me just now but I ~~de~~  
shall not delay it any longer  
than posibal you must had  
A hard time of it the 4th<sup>1</sup> by  
your tell I was sory to hear  
it I was in the Burg<sup>2</sup> at 5  
oclock myself perhaps you were  
on the same train that I was  
on I came as far as Heuvelton  
on the 6.25 train I stoped  
thair and for the extra train  
I got sumwhat wet myself  
but still not so wet as you  
told for I saw Arvilla  
VanLinda<sup>3</sup> in the car that I

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<sup>1</sup> July 4<sup>th</sup> is the date to which Henry is referring. In 1871, Ogdensburg had a large celebration of this holiday. *Ogdensburg Journal*, July 03, 1871, *New York State Historic Newspapers*, <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn85054113/1871-07-03/ed-1/seq-3/>.

<sup>2</sup> This is a shortened form of Ogdensburg, New York.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1870 census schedules for Saint Lawrence County and listed on the same page as the Mills family, Arvilla Vandelinda, a seventeen-year-old female, lived at home with her forty-two-year-old mother, Sylvia, and five siblings in the Town of Canton.

was in and a number from  
 the Falls<sup>4</sup> I suppose you sent  
 your picture expecting mine in  
 return did you not well I  
 Can it is that is if you will  
 except of it I am most ashamed  
 to send such a looking profi-  
 le but it is all I have at present  
 it is not ~~longt~~ long now before  
 fall and then I suppose  
 you are coming up to take  
 Painting dont fail to let me  
 know when you are about  
 to come ha ha ha perhaps  
 you will prefure to go to Potsdam  
 to school in stead of coming  
 up hear but to pleas me  
 let your chois be to come  
 hear that is when the time  
 comes for you to start  
 Thair was three from you  
 place to the Burg the ~~forth~~ 4th  
 That got into a fight and  
 was put into the Blackhole<sup>5</sup>  
 They faught in the smoking  
 car<sup>6</sup> I was an eyewitness  
 the prisners was Henry [spring]  
 and William Bill and son  
 WHISKEY done it all  
 It was a site to behold  
 # Well it is time to go  
 to Bed and I will close  
 let me hear from you  
 before long for I Shall  
 look for a letter the  
 last of this week give  
 my love to all and receive  
 ash a share for yourself

Henry

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<sup>4</sup> This is a referral to Rensselaer Falls, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Refers to any place prisoners are kept. Green, Jonathon. *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> "The smoking car is, of course, designed especially for the use of smokers." Railway Review. United States: W. A. Smith, 1881.