

1933

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James Innerarity



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Recommended Citation

Innerarity, James (1933) "The Panton, Leslie Papers: James Innerarity to John Forbes," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 12 : No. 3 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol12/iss3/5>

THE PANTON, LESLIE PAPERS

James Innerarity to John Forbes

Mobile 12th August 1815

John Forbes Esq.

Dear Sir,

It is a long time since I have written to you and for a long time I neither dared nor could write to you. During this interval I have trusted to my brother to keep you informed of our affairs. Since a year past we have both passed through many scenes disagreeable to recollect, more so to relate, and torturing to suffer. The worst evils we have met with, however, beyond all Comparison have been inflicted by the hands of our quondam Countrymen. Of all the Fiends that ever assumed the human form to disgrace it and torment mankind, some of the most atrocious and the vilest were vomited on these Coasts by England during the last summer or fall. On this subject (which I hope John has fully explained, I dare touch but slightly ; for when I think of it, my reason leaves me. Sufficient to say that for the unparalleled wrongs we and others have suffered from these bands of Commissioned robbers, these British Algerines, these barbarians cowardly and treacherous, who flee before their enemies and plunder their allies a memorial claiming reparation has been addressed to Castlereagh. This was a last resource ; for the sundry representations addressed to the British Commanders, Cochran and Malcolm produced nothing but false promises, equivocation and evasions: Neither indeed do I expect any better re-

Note—This letter is in continuation of the series of records of Panton, Leslie & Co. and its successor, John Forbes & Co., the publication of which has been continuous in the *Quarterly*. These are in the possession of Mrs. John W. Greenslade who has transcribed them.

sult from the other: these High and Mighty gentlemen tread us worthless worms beneath their feet, and think us insolent if they but chance to notice that we writhe with anguish.

You also I perceive (and it affords me no consolation) have had your share of suffering from that pillager in chief, the truly denominated "infamous Cockburn." I shall be really rejoiced to learn that you have recovered your property, but I fear that the far famed Shewy humanity of the African association, Abolition Society and others of a like stamp will prove an insuperable bar to your success. In the eyes of these Right Revd. Honble. Right Worshipful and Right Honest Gentry, Negro Stealing is no crime but rather the chief of virtues-of course they will protect the thieves-Too much however of this most detested subject.

My brother will have kept you informed of our transactions at Pensacola, where I believe some good business has been done to counterbalance in part our losses.

Here for years past we have literally been toiling for nothing, partly from having received none but scanty and ill assorted supplies, partly from the circumstances of the time. I suggested sometime ago to my brother and desired him to communicate to you a new plan for carrying on our business to this place. It is first to abandon London for Liverpool. On comparing a variety of invoices from the latter place with our own from the former I find the difference ever since 1803 would hve amounted to a fortune: and taking into consideration the reduced profits that we must hereafter calculate on making ruin will follow a continuance of our old system.

In the next place our importations to or exportations from Mobile can no longer be carried on

through Pensacola, as goods once landed there will be subject here to an increased duty, as our collector will not afterwards suffer them to come here on the English Invoice ; but at an imaginary value that they bear or are supposed to bear at Pensacola, which of course presumes the addition of the charges of importation there. It is very clear also that American shipping must be employed for our importations here to avoid the addition of 10 p cent on the amount of duties on goods imported in foreign vessels.

Perhaps even a greater difference will be imposed when the new Permanent Tariff to be reported to Congress next Session is established. I therefore propose that our future orders for this place be addressed to Hamnet Roscoe and Wilson through you or thro' Gordon-that they be instructed to lay them in at the shortest customary credit, say six months at the utmost or to ship there on as low freight as they can, taking advantage if possible of shipping going out to New Orleans with short freight for that purpose. Such will take our goods for less than vessels freighted solely on our account.

If Mr. Glennie has made the establishment in Liverpool that he announced sometime since and you to give him our business I can have no objection, but to whoever is to have it, I would beg you to be particular in recommending the utmost care in laying in our assortments, as on that and the lowness of price depends our whole chance of success and hopes of being able to make speedy remittances-Our returns will be principally be made in bills; or when Cotton comes to be plenty in our market, (as will be the case in the year 1817 and not before, as little has been planted this year) in that article on their order and account, as I would rather decline speculating in it at all times for ourselves.

In conformity with these ideas I now hand you an order that you can address at pleasure to H. R. & W. or to A. Glennie Son & Co. in which you will find nothing but articles of trade and such as commonly command a ready sale. They ought to be here early in-March to insure a reasonable sale before our dull season (from the latter part of May to the end of September) comes on. If they cannot be here in March, I would suggest the propriety of dividing the shipment, if it can be done without much increasing the freight on the whole (in the way aforementioned) so that one half should arrive in April or May and the other half in September-the whole of the woolens to be reserved for the latter.

I would advise that our Pensacola trade also be carried on to and from Liverpool. The trifling quantity of skins that will hereafter be purchased can be disposed of to advantage in New Orleans, if we adhere in a certain degree to the plan of giving reduced prices for them, as is completely in our power. Our importations to that place can come in British or American vessels or freight. If British vessels continue to be employed in the New Orleans trade; freights to Pensacola in such ought to be procured on lower terms than in Americans, as the former would seldom get valuable outward freights to N. Orleans on acct. of the foreign duty-if, in addition to this supposed. low outward freight, a conditional bargain could be made to be optional with us to accept or not, for a reasonably low homeward freight for Cotton, it might give us some advantage in the Market here, on Account of the reduced duty on the British bottom, being as we hear only 1d p w & 3d in Americans. This advantage to be sure would be in some degree counterbalanced by the freight to Pensacola of the absurd system of duties there-In no case however should we be bound

either here or at Pensacola to provide a homeward freight for the vessels-If H. R. & W. do our business in England, it may become expedient. to give our N. Orleans business to their new branch in that City-this would give a general direction to our transactions that would be advantageous to all the parties concerned-I do not however promise that such shall be the Case.

I must again beg leave to state that a very strict attention to our interests will be required-on this indeed will depend the Continuance of the Correspondence.

I trouble you on this occasion, because it is the first step in a very important change in the Conduct of our business; one which more immediately requires your Sanction, and which I should be far from presuming to attempt to carry into effect without it.

The Indian Nations, the Creeks particularly, may now. be. looked on as annihilated, - their trade has long been an unprofitable one, but from the Ockmulgie to the Tombegbie, & from the Spanish line to the Cherokees (excepting the N. E. angle of the Creek Nation) their place will be supplied in a few short months by industrious Whites, the products of whose industry will afford an hundred fold trade, & a much more profitable one, of which we can obtain our full share if we are well & regularly supplied with goods.

The importance of Jackson's treaty to all our establishments in indeed great. The population on the Alhabama & its waters will now Create Mobile, & will be of inestimable advantage to Pensacola, whilst the Settlements that will Speedily be formed on the Chatahootchie & Flint Rivers would have given (& may yet give) not only value to the Apalachicola lands, but have made that establishment

as a Mercantile one highly profitable. That however now depends on Contingencies.

A variety of reasons induced me to use my efforts to prevent the Semanories from joining the hostile Creeks-I should have succeeded and we should now have been in possession of a valuable establishment, but in the critical moment the enemies of peace & of human kind arrived & destroyed my work. The consequence (not to enter into details that drive me almost to frenzy) is this, Our Store is broken up with considerable loss, over & above that of our Cattle eaten by the plunderers, & negroes robbed by them-our influence over those Indians dead, or expiring, & Prospect Bluff & the Lands in possession of the Negroes whom the unspeakable Villains robbed from their Allies the Spaniards of Pensacola & East Florida, & even (astounding iniquity !!!) from the Indians themselves.

Yes-when the return of peace stopped their own career of atrocity; when the British Admirals pressed by the representations of the inhabitants & Government of Pensacola, found that they could not without eternal disgrace Carry off the negroes, they adopted a course, that while it bore a Shew of honour, really was calculated & I doubt not meant, to perpetuate by them the miseries of the Country-They would not deliver up the Negroes ; no, that could not be done without a violation of British faith!!! Which had been pledged for their freedom, but they *left* them at Prospect Bluff (after having trained them to Military discipline) in possession of a well constructed fort, with plenty of provisions, & with Cannon Arms & Ammunition of every description, not only in abundance but in Profusion for their defence-report says, they have even since sent them an accession of Strength, and they are now organized as Pirates, have several small Ves-

sels well armed, & some Piracies that lately occurred in the Lakes are supposed to have been committed by them.

Although one fruitless effort has been made to regain possession, yet I despair not, the attempt will be renewed as soon as any opening presents : as a last recourse, the Lands can be sold to Americans who will settle them in spite of Indians, Negroes or English.

I entertain therefore still, strong hopes of turning them to good Account & of possessing my 5000 acre tract, when your good self with your nephew & my friend Gordon shall see proper to make me a title to it.

Pray did you ever receive the plats I sent you for that purpose through my brother.

The mention of lands naturally introduces the subject of the Baton rouge Lands & my pledge to you, that as soon after peace as practicable, they & our other possessions, should be disposed of, for the purpose of clearing off with their proceeds all our old scores.

That pledge is as yet unredeemed, but not forgotten.

After so great distress as this Country experienced, things do not all at once resume their wonted course or activity, nor can property rise from its depression to its proper value.

On two occasions within these few months I have written to Milne respecting the prospects of disposing of our New Orleans property being desirous of realizing it first.

You have enclosed Copy of his answer to my last letter just now received. I also wrote in April last pr. duplicate to our Agent at Baton Rouge, Mr. Percy but have as yet received no answer: from

other sources I have heard that Lands like ours, in that quarter, are worth with warranted titles from 2 to 3 drs. p. acre--The rise in the price of Cotton may be expected to enhance their value still further, & the fall being the season of emigration, I shall write to Percy to sell, ours if he can in entire tracts without warrantie at from 2 drs. to 2 1/2 drs. p. acre--One fourth down & the balance in one two three & four years--Altho' I look on the risk as nothing we cannot properly give a warrantie until Congress have Confirmed the title, & as the Commissioners have by this time made their reports this may be expected next Session.

Mobile, since the bustle of War subsided has been Comparatively very dull: it will not however long continue so : the great emigration expected this fall to the Alabama will give it an impulse that will hereafter go on increasing. Meantime houses bear a very fair, rent; not to say an high one.

At this moment we have some empty, but they will soon fill. This-description of property as being very productive is the last I would wish to part with--Whenever I can realise good prices however in proportion to the rents it shall be sold.

Our unimproved lots & lands in this district I shall sell whenever proper opportunities of doing so occur.

I have this object constantly in view, & I do hope that before the end of next year, the whole may be disposed of on such terms, as will enable us to do full honour to all our engagements. Some of our lots I mean to sell at a perpetual rent, as the most eligible plan for their speedy disposal, but in general I shall sell for one fourth Cash, & the balance in one two three & four years, especially the lands which it would be difficult to dispose of on shorter times to advantage.

The enclosed copies of letters from R. P. Johnson & a Mr. Irving, nephew of a Gov. Irving of Georgia to J. P. Kennedy will inform you of an attack that I expect will very soon be made upon us.

I got the letters from J. P. K. who settled in our town soon after its capture, & whom I have since retained putting into his hands the few Suits we have-We are of course friends according to the Spanish proverb. On giving the letters he observed (altho' I neither consulted nor informed him on the Subject) that Johnson could not recover, as being an interested person, & having no evidence but his own.

I observed simply, that he had made the attempt before at Charleston, & had thought prudent to withdraw & that if he renewed it he would most certainly burn his fingers. I take no notice of this affair, until I see how the Confederates mean to begin, but I shall resist the claim as in justice & duty bound to the very utmost.

Meantime Mr. Gordon should be informed of this new Circumstance, & your engagements with him be (as I think) suspended until the event be Known.

Let me have his & your advice on the subject.

Has Armstrong or any other lawyer of eminence been consulted? You can write me in your New Cipher which I received & have a copy.

Our bar here is not remarkable for abilities-the best lawyers are young men the one whom I mean to employ in future (continuing however to give a retainer to Kennedy, on the principle on which the Indians worship the Devil) is our late land Commissioner Mr. Crawford, a cousin of the Ambassador's, & a man in my opinion & that of every one here, of much probity & rather superior in talents

& knowledge to any of his brethren. He is now however absent at Washington City making his report. To him, in the defence of this cause I shall probably join another young man we have here, an Eleve of Livingstons of N. O. who is said to be Clever, & should it appear requisite I shall even get Counsel from New Orleans. All this will be expensive, but the business will be brought to a decision & I have little doubt to a favorable one to the heirs of the old partners. We shall have the Judge against us so far as he dare go, but the Cause can be moved out of his district if ground for it appears.

Until the attack takes place, I can not anticipate its mode, but every obstacle possible shall be thrown in the way of the enemy-you shall be advised when it begins.

It may be proper or necessary that your nephew & Mr. Gordon send me a power to act and employ Counsel for them & their connexions in the Suit of Johnson & Irving-their simple letters provisionally may answer.

The Brickery speculation has not been so productive as I expected, owing to the same cause as all our other evils., From the length of time that it was necessarily abandoned, the works had suffered so considerably as to cause the earlier & better part of the present season to be Spent in repairs: it is now however going on as rapidly as my diminished force (since the robbery of ten valuable Slaves by the plunderers at Bon Secours) will permit, & I still have sanguine hopes of its proving a very valuable establishment. Mobile is to be built ; & will take off a quantity of materials, besides the demand for New Orleans, which latter has not yet revived however to any considerable degree.

If H. R. & W accept our business, I presume they would do it on the terms they formerly did business with Simpson, say, on half commissions on both sides & sharing all such commissions as they should recommend to us & we to them.

The impossibility of procuring freight from London except by Chartering & the exhorbitance of those Charters is a conclusive Argument against that port & in favor of Liverpool for our trade. Vessels are almost daily sailing from the latter for New Orleans with little or no freight to load Cotton home, whereas London has hardly any trade in this quarter at all.

In proof of this I could purchase at this moment from regular Merchants, goods at a considerably lower advance on genuine Invoices, than what we have ever imported than from London, adding the American duties-this supposes certainly a very great difference in the Charges of importation, besides the difference in price that I have already noted-Say, I could now buy certain goods at 60 p cent advance-duties 32 to 35-when have we imported for 25 p cent-supposing even the Merchant to have no profit?

My brother & myself have been remarkably unfortunate with regard to our assistants. Some have become drunkards, & been dismissed, others & very valuable ones have left us in quest of better prospects than this Country, especially under its late disastrous circumstances, afforded. We want each of us one confidential capable assistant at least; if you could help us to them it would be doing us a great Service; indeed I foresee that without we get them we shall never be able to have our affairs brought into or kept in proper order. You may think this a trifling difficulty, but I find it otherwise, as after the experience we have had I cannot bring

myself to trust A[merica]n rovers in search of employment.

I remain My Dear Sir

Yours Most Sincerely

JAS. INNERARITY

It is possible that Congress may continue the present high duties on some of the articles ordered or even may lay on still higher. Should advices of that kind reach Liverpool, before the Shipment is made we request such articles be omitted.