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## A FOOTNOTE TO CAPTAIN YOUNG'S ITINERARIES

### *Four Letters of Jeremy Robinson With a Memorandum*

By JOSEPH B. LOCKEY

Jeremy Robinson, who left an account of the journey which he made from Tallahassee to Pensacola in 1832, had a brief and melancholy connection with the history of Florida. He had been appointed by the Government at Washington as special messenger to convey to the American Consul at Havana an order from the Spanish authorities for the delivery of such part of the archives of the Floridas as still remained in the hands of the Spanish in that city. He was to go by way of Tallahassee to confer with General Call and then proceed to Pensacola where he was to make further inquiries regarding the papers in question. Upon his arrival in Havana, he was to communicate all the information he had obtained to the Consul, William Shaler, and as soon as the business was dispatched he was to return to Washington with such documents as could be obtained. <sup>1</sup> But delays interposed. Meanwhile Shaler died, <sup>2</sup> and some time afterward Robinson himself succumbed. <sup>3</sup> The negotiations were continued by Shaler's successor, N. P. Trist, who was able in 1835

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**NOTE-** *A Topographical Memoir on East and West Florida With Itineraries of General Jackson's Army*, by Capt. Hugh Young of that army, appeared in the last three issues of the *Quarterly*. Another series on the same general subject of roads and travel in Florida in the early nineteenth century will be begun in the October number next: papers relating to the survey and construction of the Pensacola-St. Augustine highway, arranged and with an introduction by Mark F. Boyd to whom we are indebted for the Young memoir.-Ed.

<sup>1</sup> Livingston to Robinson, May 7, 1832, State Department, Special Missions, I.

<sup>2</sup> *The Pacific Historical Review*, II, 439n.

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Moore, *A Digest of International Law*, I, 445.

to transfer to Washington, as the dearly bought result of all these labors, only forty-five documents, more than half of which, it appears, cannot now be found in the archives of the State Department where they were deposited.<sup>4</sup>

The present purpose is not however to discuss the missing papers nor Robinson's part in the long drawn out efforts to recover them. It is rather to call attention to the interesting letters he wrote while on his way to Havana. One might wish that these letters had been richer in detail; yet brief as they are they give valuable information, especially in regard to travel in those early days. Robinson, it appears, went from Washington to Norfolk by boat. He then proceeded overland to Fayetteville, North Carolina, "with as much speed as the mail and other conveyances" would permit. What his route was from this point to Tallahassee, he does not state; but whatever the route, the journey was fatiguing and "productive of some illness", which the traveler hoped would not prove "ultimately injurious". On inquiry at Tallahassee Robinson learned that no conveyance by water could be obtained at St. Marks or other near-by points. Accordingly he proceeded to Marianna by the weekly stage. The rest of the journey he seemed to dread, for the

<sup>4</sup> L. M. Perez, *Guide to Materials for American History in Cuban Archives*, Appendix B. The correspondence relating to the delivery of the Floridas sent to the Congress by the President with his message of December 5, 1821, (*American State Papers, Foreign Relations*, IV, 740-808), contain many references to the Florida archives. Of the documents delivered at the time of the transfer, some 65,000 in all, the major portion relate to East Florida. They are now in the Library of Congress. Robinson's efforts were directed mainly toward the recovery of certain papers belonging to the archives of West Florida. Some of these documents seem to have been lost in transit from Pensacola to Havana.

(The colonial archives of the Spanish Floridas which were and were not delivered to the United States authorities have been the subject of numerous queries. It is hoped that Dr. Lockett will give us a paper on them soon.-Ed.)

route was "lonely" and "without regular roads, habitations, or conveyances". Yet, he declared, he would undertake it with "cheerful allacrity". How he was diverted from the regular road he tells, apparently with some satisfaction, in his letter from Holmes Valley. There is nothing in the letter to indicate the exact point of embarkation on Holmes Creek,<sup>5</sup> but it must have been about where the town of Vernon is now located. When Robinson at last reached Pensacola, he had been six weeks on the road—eighteen days from Washington to Tallahassee, and twenty-four from Tallahassee to Pensacola.

The publication of these letters, it is to be hoped, will stimulate the search for like material relating to the early years of the territorial history of the state. Many precious documents have no doubt been lost beyond recall. Yet there still must exist letters, diaries, and other documents, which, together with such official records as survive, will enable the historian to paint the scene as it was immediately following the transfer of the territory to the United States. Not a little of this material is safely held in public archives, and in great private collections. The fugitive and scattered papers that may have escaped the ravages of time are, on the other hand, in danger of ultimate destruction. To the recovery and preservation of this material, attention should be directed first of all.

The letters of Jeremy Robinson will serve not only to illustrate the sort of material known to exist, but to suggest the kind of documents that may exist in

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<sup>5</sup> John Lee Williams, in his *The Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837), p. 129, says: "This creek has a channel deeper than the river, and the enterprise of Messrs. Shackelford and Merlet has rendered it navigable, as far as Hard Labor Creek, by clearing out the timber, which had before that time obstructed the Channel. They have erected warehouses about forty miles from its mouth, to receive the produce of the Chipola planters."

hidden places in or out of the state. Robinson himself may have written—for he was much given to writing other letters, perhaps to his friends, during his brief sojourn in Florida. If so, it is possible that those letters may be found in the hands of the descendants of the original recipients. Other travelers doubtless recorded their impressions in letters or diaries which by some good fortune may have survived. Moreover many of the early settlers must have written back to their relatives and friends in Virginia, the Carolinas, or elsewhere, describing the strange scenes and conditions of life in their new surroundings. How much of such material may be recovered can only be determined after long and devoted search.

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JEREMY ROBINSON TO EDWARD LIVINGSTON <sup>6</sup>

[1]

Fayetteville May 18th, 1832.-(N. C.)

The Honourable Edward Livingston

Secretary of State

Sir :

In conformity with your instructions I have advanced with the utmost expedition to this place which I reached late last night, and shall leave at an early hour this morning, proceeding hence towards Florida (Tallahassee) with as much speed as the mail and other conveyances will permit.

On my passage from Washington to Norfolk a communication was handed to me purporting to be from the department of State, containing a transcript extract of an order from the Secretary of the Navy to Commodore Jesse Elliot, directing him to furnish a passage in any vessel of war on the West

<sup>6</sup> These letters are found in the State Department, Florida Archives, Envelope 6.

India station under his command which can be spared from other service, to a bearer of despatches from the Government of the United States to the Havanah, indicating me as the person charged with them.

It has occurred to my mind on subsequent reflection, that as the order referred to is, or appears to have been, addressed to the Commander of the Ud States squadron in the West Indies rather than to the Naval commander at Pensacola, I use this hurried occasion to acknowledge the note from the Department of State, in order that any inadvertency or discrepency, may be seasonably known to you, and if necessary so modified as to embrace a certainty of my passage to the Havannah from Florida, and from Cuba with the missing archives, should they be attainable, to the United States in any vessel of war there at the time bound home, with a veiew soley [sic] to their safety.

With great respect  
Your obedient servant.  
J. Robinson.

[2]

Tallahassee June 2nd, 1832.

To

The Honourable Edward Livingston  
Secretary of State &c, &c, &c,  
City of Washington D. C.

Sir :

I beg leave to inform you that having left Washington the 11th ultimo in the evening, I arrived at this place the 28th near night, when, on enquiry, I learnt that General Call was absent at Monticello in Jefferson county attending one of the courts-distant between thirty and forty miles ; which circumstance induced me to procure a conveyance to

that place: the evening of the 29th I delivered the despatch into his hands with which you entrusted me; and on his suggestion came back to Tallahassee the 30th ultimo.-

General Call assured me in Monticello that he would prepare the information sought for and required by the Government immediately after his return home to his residence near the City, which he stated he should do on Friday the 1st inst; but he did not reach here until today at an advanced hour, when he called on me and reiterated his purpose of having the papers and indications in reference to the withheld, detained, or missing Spanish Archives of the Floridas <sup>7</sup> ready for me by tuesday morning the 5th instant, saying that he should see me in the interim, and again at Mariana, a town or village on the road hence to Pensacola, by which route he advised me to travel.

From due investigation it is evident that no conveyance by water can be obtained either from St. Marks, or Magnolia to Pensacola, nor with certainty from any near points, and equally manifest that the journey the whole way by land is, or seems to be, the only alternative left to my choice.-a route of near three hundred miles where no stage travels, lonely, at this season hot, and always expensive-great part of the journey is without regular roads, habitations or conveyances ; yet, I undertake its performance with cheerful allacrity in the hope of being instrumental in promoting an accomplishment of the objects of the Government, so far so far as relates to me; and of affording satisfaction to the President and yourself.

No conveyance has left Tallahassee going in the direction of Pensacola since the delivery of your

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<sup>7</sup> General Call himself had been sent, to Havana in 1829 on a like mission. (*Fla. Hist. Soc. Quarterly*, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 12).

letter to General Call, - nor will one until the 5th by which I shall proceed.-

I have rather overfatigued myself in exertions to reach this with all possible promptitude, in a journey of 18 days, over a distance of about a thousand miles, productive of some illness, and present uncomfortable sensations, but which I trust will not prove ultimately injurious.

With great respect I have the honour to be  
Sir, Your Most Obdt humble servant  
J. Robinson

Tallahassee June 5th 1832.

P. S.  
Sir

In consequence of a slight indisposition General Call did not furnish me with the information sought for until yesterday the 4th-contained in a letter present yesterday by his agent in this place, having himself suddenly left the evening of the 3rd for the county of Jackson, from. whence he directed Mr. Walker, his agent, to say that he should proceed to Mariana, where he will meet me, and make some further communications, about the 9th current proximo etc-With the information acquired I shall leave here in the weekly stage for Mariana at 6 o'clock this morning in expectation of joining General Call at that place.

With great respect  
Your Obdt servt  
J. R.

Quincy June 5th 1832-4 o'clock P.M.

2nd PS.

Sir :

I have this moment been told that at Mount Vernon, a place between this and Mariana, there may be a chance of procuring a passage from the former



place to Apalachicola Bay, where a vessel is expected from New Orleans about the 10 inst, which it is understood will touch for the purpose of landing a passenger at Pensacola.

Should this information prove correct, I shall be governed by circumstances at Mount Vernon as to the eligibility of embracing it provided however it should not preclude me from again meeting with General Call, no [r] prevent me from receiving such further information as General Call may have to impart.

Very respectfully  
Your Most Obedt servt.  
J. Robinson

[3]

Holmes Valley, W. Florida, June 16th, 1832.  
The Hon. Edward Livingston  
Secretary of State of the United States.  
City of Washington.

Sir :

Agreeably to my letter from Tallahassee and Quincy, I reached Marianna for the purpose of meeting with General Call, the evening of the 6th instant : And on the return of Genl. Call the 7th, who had been absent at Webbville, he entered on the business which occasioned my visit ; but which, owing to his previous engagements, which obliged him a part of the time to be again absent in the vicinity, was not concluded until the 10th, when I continued my journey towards Pensacola, through this valley, by the route of Achatto, or Holmes creek, Choctawhatchie river, and Santa Rosa Bay and Sound, in a small river, or creek boat, no other conveyance presenting comparitively so certain and eligible.-

The Stages run no further than Marianna - the mail thence is carried on horseback once a week, with

difficulty and incertitude to Pensacola, in consequence of freshets, which have carried away the bridges, rendering the road impassable for carriages; and horses could not be procured except by purchase, or hire at a rate equivalent to purchase.\*

I am now waiting for the boat, which. is hourly expected here at a distance of about two hundred miles (by water) from Pensacola.

The delays which have occurred, and. are a source of regret to me, are unavoidable, notwithstanding my utmost efforts, as General Call can. testify.

The inland navigation is both intricate and slow yet I hope to be in Pensacola in about eight days from the time of gaining the boat, where some further enquiries may be requisite :-those completed, and a conveyance offering, I shall proceed, without loss of time, to the ultimate destination designated, in accordance with your instructions.

With great respect,

Your most obdt. hble. servant.

J. Robinson

\*Greater part of the road is represented as running through an almost uninhabited swampy country . . . in some places without a house for sixty miles. . . .

[4]

The Honourable Edward Livingston  
Secretary of State  
City of Washington

Pensacola July 5th, 1832.

Sir :

In consequence of the boat in which I was a passenger from Holmes Valley having been wrecked on the Island of Santa Rosa in a gale of wind the 24th I did not reach this place until the 26th ultimo.

In conformity with the suggestions of General Call, I have examined the records of the archives,

and as many of the Archives themselves appertaining to the Floridas deposited here, as the time would permit, besides having held such guarded conversation with several persons in consonance with his views concerning them, as were supposed to possess information illustrative of the position and character of such as he deemed most important, or are missing.

The result has been merely to procure partial and uncertain indications of the departments of the Government of Cuba where they ought to be found with some of the names of the former colonial officers of Spain in Florida and that Island, as well as of their heirs and relatives at Havanah, who may possibly hold some of the documents liable to reclamation, or are perhaps able to impart information in relation to their existence, and the places of their present deposition.

The United States Schooner Shark, Lieutenant Boerum commander, arrived here the 27th ultimo, and will sail to day for Havanah, in which vessel I shall embark for that destination.

On my safe arrival at Havanah, the information desired from General Call, with that obtained here, shall be communicated to Mr. Shaler, or his official substitute, where I shall be governed by your instructions, and his negotiations, as to the time I may remain there and the period of my embarkation embarkation for the United States.

Lieutenant Boerum states, that he recently conveyed from Tampico several persons late residents of the republic of Mexico to the Balize, expelled by the revolutionary commanders from that port of Mexico, a portion of whom were, or appeared to have been, naturalized citizens of the United States, And moreover, that vexation had been experienced by the native citizens of the latter-merchants and

others-through the dictation or coercion of the dominant party in the former, manifested in violations of their personal, neutral and commercial rights, guaranteed by the treaty between the United States and Mexico, which that party did not recognize, accompanied by arbitrary exaction of the payment of impost duties in anticipation of their becoming due at the Custom House, with other abridgement of priveleges.-

Whether the naturalization of these alien persons in the United States referred to had been in compliance with the laws applicable to that subject, or how far those persons were, or may have been divested of their citizenship by subsequent acts of expatriation on their part which might impair or even forfeit their claim to her protection, does not appear.

Under your general verbal authority to acquaint you with any event, or incident, having an influence on the intercourse or interests of the United States, the preceeding statement is submitted: and I furthermore beg leave respectfully to suggest, whether a withdrawal of the Ud States squadron from the West Indies, the Coast of Mexico, and this station at this juncture, might not prove prejudicial to the commerce and interests of the former in those quarters, both as regards a maintenance of her rights and interests, and as affording an opportunity for a renewal of piratical depredations, at present apparently suspended.

Perhaps it may be useful, and is also due to candour, to observe, that the spirit of concord is less perfect and predominant in this section of the Union than is desirable.

With great respect  
Your obedient servant  
J. Robinson.

P. S. Pensacola July 6th 1832.-

Among the Spanish archives here, the original decree of the Captain General of Cuba sanctioning an alienation of Indian lands, permitted by the Spanish Governor of Florida, to the house of *John Forbes & co* as is set forth on a document purporting to be a copy of that decree, used by these claimants in the judicial tribunals of this territory, in evidence of their assumed rights, is not found; and, if it ever existed, is either among the archives elsewhere, or has been abstracted from them-perhaps surreptitiously-respecting the genuineness and validity of which doubts are entertained. The great claim of Messrs. Forbes & co pending in the Supreme Court of the United States on the appeal of their representatives, is my motive for adverting to that topic.

Relative to the posture of public affairs in Mexico, the advices received here are not so specific as to afford a sufficient data for the establishment of a sound judgment on their entire character. Some of the facts cited in the foregoing letter respecting them may have had their origin in a conservative principle, which may eventuate in a good order of things, not well understood.

It is expected that the Shark will sail at an early hour of this day, when there will be no other vessel of the United States at this station.

Very respectfully  
Your Most obd servt  
J. R.