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A DIARY OF JESSE TALBOT BERNARD  
Newnansville and Tallahassee

In the fall of 1849 a young Virginian, a William and Mary student, cast his eyes toward the southern-most part of our country and made plans to come to Florida and teach school. He was Jesse Talbot Bernard, later to become mayor of Tallahassee and to serve many years on Florida's Board of Education.

But first his "Pa" had promised him a trip to the Quaker City, which he had long wished to visit, and of this trip there were two outstanding events of which he wrote in his diary, one a visit to a Quaker meeting, the other a visit to Philadelphia's art galleries. He says in his journal:

Sept. 14, 1847. I reached Philadelphia this morning. I had a letter of introduction to a friend of my father's named Hallowell, a Quaker and a most excellent man. Being anxious to attend one of the Quaker meetings he told me that if I would come on Fourth Day morning (Wednesday morning) he would accompany me to one.

*Thursday.* Yesterday I went with Mr. Hallowell to a Quaker meeting ; it seemed a curious church to my eyes, for they had no pulpit and the seats were

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NOTE-These excerpts from the diary of her grandfather have been selected and edited with notes by Mrs. Rebecca Phillips. Judge Bernard was born in Portsmouth, Virginia, on August 20, 1829. He was graduated from William and Mary College in 1847. Received the degrees of A.B. and A.M. from Centenary College in 1848. He came to Florida in 1849 and taught school near Tallahassee. In 1850 he married Mary E. Bradford, and two years later he moved his family to Newnansville, where he taught school, edited the Florida Dispatch, and practiced law. Returning to Tallahassee he was county judge 1859-1873, a member Board of Education 1869-1900 (?) mayor of Tallahassee, and captain in the 8th Florida regiment in the Civil War. He died on Oct. 30, 1909.

all fronting each other. They opened the service with prayer and there they all sat, the men with their hats on, by themselves, the women with bonnets on, all alike, and sitting together. They sat for an hour and a half without saying a word, then first one and then another arose and testified, -something like our Methodist Love Feast. It was profitable to sit and listen to them and profitable to sit there in silence and meditate. I went back to the hotel feeling that the morning had been well spent.

In the afternoon I walked up the street and visited the Academy of Fine Arts, and though not very fond of painting and sculpture, I remained there several hours and would have remained longer if time had permitted. Most of the pictures were oil paintings executed by the most distinguished artists. There were three from the brush of West, "Christ Healing the Sick," "Death On A Pale Horse" and "Paul & Barnabas". I liked Christ Healing the Sick best of all.

[It is said by art critics that this picture was by far the greatest and most popular picture of that period. West, when asked for a subscription to the Philadelphia Hospital, then being promoted, said he was not able to give money but would paint them a picture. He painted this enormous composition, containing over 100 figures, "Christ Healing The Sick," which, when exhibited, created such a sensation that the British Institute of Arts offered him three thousand guineas for it, which he could not afford to refuse. But a replica was painted and sent to the Philadelphia Hospital, where it still hangs. Its exhibition proved a huge source of revenue for the Hospital, earning \$20,000.00 from admission fees in one year.

Leaving Philadelphia this young college graduate in search of a job started southward, and writes of having had a pleasant trip to Charleston, and:]

Expect to leave here tomorrow for Savannah, go from thence to Macon and from there by a line of stages to Tallahassee. [August found him in Leon County, in the community now known as Bradfordville, where he was engaged to teach the children of several plantations in that vicinity.]

*August, 20, 1850.* This is my birthday ; I am 21 years of age. Yesterday for the first time in my life I went on a fox hunt, putting on an old coat and substituting a cap for a hat and taking a horn, we started off on horseback. The hounds had not been in the woods long before they were off on old Reynard's trail. Away they went and we after them at a sweeping gallop through the woods. I could never see, before how a person could ride through a thicket at full gallop, but I did it this time. It is fine sport and there is considerable excitement about it.

[On November 28, 1850 he was married to Mary Bradford, the daughter of one of the patrons of his school and in another year he had bought some land in Alachua county near the site of old Newnansville and had gone ahead to superintend the building of a home for his bride. In the next few months there are few entries in his diary for the new landowner was occupied with the clearing of land and planting of his crops.]

Wednesday morning, 15th June, 1851. Today our new paper, the Florida Dispatch, made its appearance, Jesse T. Bernard, Editor.

[The few later references to this newspaper are incidental or casual, and it is not known how long he published it.]

*Feb. 1st 1852.* I left Leon County on Tuesday the 9th of January, staying several days with General Bailey, my father's friend, at Monticello. Monday I staid all night at Mr. Hawkins' at Madison. The next morning as it was snowing I remained another day and night. When we got ready to start I found one of my horses lame and the wagon tongue broken. I had to secure another horse and have a new wagon tongue made. It was very cold during this trip. And now I am fixed in my own home . . . It is lonesome here by myself and I long for the companionship of my dear Mary.

*Feb. 26, 1852.* Am so thankful to my Heavenly Father for bringing me here in safety, and for this place which is to be our very own. Brother Henry [Henry Bradford of Bradfordville] will stay with me until my wife comes. I have a prospect of teaching the Masonic School at \$1,000.00 a year. . . . A Mr. Cooper, on this circuit, will probably preach here next Sunday. He is at Alligator [the present Lake City] now. . . . Mary sent her carpet-bag by Henry. Now when I see her trunk coming I will know for certain that she herself is coming.

*March 7, 1852.* Today we are to have preaching by a Mr. White. Mr. Cooper preached a fair sermon last Sunday. Yesterday a week ago we had a very severe storm and I never have known so many trees to be blown down, the roads were completely blocked and we have been without mail ever since, some think one half of the crops are hoplessly injured. Peter, one of Pa's men, whom he was sending to me, was on board a vessel that came very near being shipwrecked last month. The mate on this vessel was drowned. Peter has been of great value in putting in the spring crops.

*March 14, 1852.* Mary and baby and her brother and Sister Martha got here today. I am very hap-

py. All stood the trip well and the dear little baby, as soon as he was laid down, commenced laughing. He is a sweet little fellow and very interesting. [They lost this baby a year later.]

*March 28th.* Preaching again today; it is fair and very warm. Henry and Sister Martha have left for home. Poor Mary, I feel so sorry for her, parting with her kin. She has never been so far from home before. Two of my horses have died.

*Sunday Morning - May 2, 1852.* We have organized a Temperance Society and Sunday School, and last night elected officers in the Sons Of Temperance. There is a vast field of usefulness for such a society. I have witnessed more dissipation in the last few weeks than I ever saw before. Drunken brawls are common.

[In May he takes his little family home to Portsmouth for a visit to his parents and writes :]

*May 26, 1852 - Portsmouth, Va.* Oh how thankful I am to be in my native state once more and see my family and to have them see my dear Mary and the babe. . . . I am in hopes of collecting a Revolutionary claim of about \$18,000.00. I have just passed my 23rd birthday here in Portsmouth.

[At this time he became interested in the new art of shorthand or, as it was then called, "phonography".]

I think of writing phonography in my journal in order to perfect myself in this new art. I am of the opinion that in time the use of this will be universal. I can do in 5 lines what it takes 11 lines to write out in the usual manner. [There follows page after page of characters that do not look like Greggs, whatever they are. He hoped to bring back from Virginia several barrels of pork as he writes:]

*Sep. 2nd* Fall has set in. Yesteday there was a sale of hogs and cured meats at the court house, an

auction sale. Thinking I might buy some pork cheap I attended this sale. The pork was sold to the highest bidder for \$18.50.

[Returning to Newnansville, he seems to have secured the school of which he spoke, which he thereafter refers to as "The Institute".] : I have opened school with 25 scholars and prospects of many more.

[In another little cloth-bound book is a careful record of the scholars with their grades. Here are the names of these old Newnansville scholars of 1852 :]

William K. Boston, Mark Boston, Sam Bradford, Ed Bradford, Joseph P. Dell, Charles H. Carr, James Harley, Jesse S. Harvill, Robert Lester, David Moody, Frances Ohmstead, William Dell, Henrietta Dell, Florida A. Dell, Francis Simms, Wm. L. Hart, Chas. Bennermen, Jasper Wilson, Louisa Wilson, Rebecca Youngblood, William Bates.

*Aug. 20, 1853.* Today is my birthday: I always hail birthdays with pleasure. At such times it is profitable to review the past, to be thankful for mercies, penitent for errors, and to form resolutions for the better. May God help me and mine. . . . I feel truly thankful to God for His mercies in blessing me as he has, and giving me so much of the comforts of life; I feel that life has been even better than I deserved. My trust is in Him. . . . Oh, it is so good to abide in Him. He is so gracious to me; I have felt His presence so much in this last year."

*October 1, 1853.* We have had very pleasant weather but on our trip to Suwanee Springs the horse got frightened and ran the carriage against a stump smashing the singletree and we were unable to pursue our journey; rain set in; we reached Suwanee Springs Saturday afternoon and remained there until Monday morning. We had quite a pleas-

ant time bathing and drinking a plenty of the sulphur water. Monday afternoon we reached Alligator, where I learned to my surprise I was a candidate for Solicitor. However I promptly withdrew my name and let the other candidates fight it out between themselves. We reached home safely Tuesday. The little one seems much better. And Mary too. God bless them and help me with my Mary to bring my child up in the fear of the Lord.

*October 25, 1853.* I like to be busy-it is sinful to be idle and lazy. I must try and rise earlier too, for I think it is a sin to lie abed late.

[date illegible] I have sold the farm for \$5,000.00. We will move in to Newnansville.

*July 2nd, 1854.* Mary has returned after a little visit to her parents; I was so glad to see her come home. I missed her very much, though I know she has been lonely for her sisters and brothers. . . . A few days before Mary's arrived I obtained a license to practice law. . . . It was quite a surprise to her as I had not told her.

*July 11, 1854.* Returned today from Alligator, where I attended a Masonic celebration. Left Friday afternoon and reached Alligator the next morning. Met a number of acquaintances and preserved everything of interest. Yesterday a chapter of Royal Arch Masons was formed here. I, with several others, took the degrees. It is a fine institution. If men would live up to its principles this would be a better world.

*July 20, 1854.* We went to Worthington Springs with baby for the water. I was told it would be very beneficial to the baby and wife, too.

*August 20, 1854.* This day I am 25 years old. Today is an era in my life. Yesterday I tendered my resignation to the Trustees of the Institute and I am now dependent on my profession at the bar. . . .

I trust that all things may work together for our good. . . . O that the Lord would watch over me and direct me in this new vocation.

*September 4, 1854.* The money market is pretty tight. . . . I find it difficult to make my collections. Of my last school bill I have collected but \$25.00

*Nov. 19, 1854.* Today, six weeks ago I left home to attend the courts in the Southern circuit and returned last Thursday, after an absence of nearly 6 weeks. It being the first time I had attended the Courts I succeeded far better than I expected. I had a number of cases. I went as far as Tampa where I remained 3 weeks. . . . The fish and oysters at Tampa are very fine.

*Sunday, December 10, 1854.* Yesterday, a week ago, I left for Ocala to attend Court at that place and was absent nearly a week, returning day before yesterday. . . . I was not as successful as I have been in some of the other counties, there being not a very full docket. Today I received some things from home, among these things was the secretary and bookcase of my dear mother, and the old family Bible, with the register of the births of our scattered family. It made me feel almost as if I were in Virginia with this dear familiar piece of furniture near me.

*Thursday, December 14th.* There is much sickness at this time. In nearly every family there is a man of its members sick. I have sat up with the ill so much that I am sick myself. . . . Miss Maggie Boston, a young lady of nineteen and Colonel B. M. Dell, one of the oldest and most respectable citizens of this country passed away this week. . . . May the Lord watch over me and mine. On last Monday the community was shocked at the intelligence that our fellow citizen John G. Reardon, Esq., had committed suicide; I was awakened by his servant and

hurriedly dressed and went over, to find him lifeless in a pool of blood: he had shut himself up in his office and slashed his throat with a razor.

*June 14, 1855.* This morning I went to church and heard Brother Fleming preach. He is a young Presbyterian minister ; his delivery, though short, was good and encouraged me. We have been highly favored the last 2 months by having preaching every Sabbath; circuit preaching every other Sabbath, the intervening Sundays being filled by volunteers. Dr. Fleming preached several times. We have a fine Sunday School and quite a respectable library. Teachers and scholars all seem to be interested.

*July 24, 1855.* Went to preaching today. The preacher, Brother Rivers, seems to be a devout man, one who fears God and is anxious to further his cause.

*January 5, 1856.* This morning I lost a fine horse, this being the third I have lost since coming to this country. . . . It is a heavy blow to me. . . . This morning I commenced reading my Bible through for the 11th time.

*April 1, 1856.* On Friday the 20th I left for the Northern Circuit, but finding there was no court held in Levy County I returned home instead of going on to Hernando, as I contemplated at first, having left my little daughter quite sick. On my return I found my dear Mary had been quite sick too. The doctor has advised me to take little Bettie and Mary with me to Tampa. Accordingly I abandoned the idea of attending court at Hernando and taking my sick ones with me as soon as they were able to travel we went to Tampa, accompanied by Mary's sister, Lizzie. We had a very hard time of it, both going and returning, the roads being very rough and it raining two days. The carriage tongue broke, the harness gave way, and this made us

travel but a short distance in one day. However little Bettie improved and Mary and Liz enjoyed the fine fish and oysters. The wives of the members of the Bar called on the ladies and they expressed themselves as very much pleased with this visit. . . . I had some important cases.

*July 4th.* Today being the glorious Fourth we men were to celebrate the day by an oration and dinner but it is now raining. We expected to have the ladies out to the dinner, but I suppose the weather will prevent them from turning out. Quite an excitement exists in our town at this time on the matter of railroads. It is thought that one will be run through our village. If this be true it will considerably enhance the value of property. We may now look forward to brighter days. The engineers have passed through this place and the route they surveyed yesterday passed about a quarter of a mile from this village.

*Newnansville, Florida-Nov. 2nd, 1856.* This morning I assisted in performing the Masonic ceremonies over the grave of poor Coker ; Coker was a young lawyer of our town and for the three years he had been here he had succeeded in building up a lucrative practice. In the spring of 1854 he and young Stewart, another lawyer, fought a duel. He received injuries from which he never fully recovered. Now both are in the grave. Both young men, healthy, full of promise, yet soon cut down. The funeral sermon was preached by Rev. G. C. Pelot. After he finished Brother Stephen Frazer, Pt. Master of the Lodge gave some account of the last moments of the deceased and expressed the belief that he had died the death of a Christian.

*Sunday, November 16th, 1856.* I would much rather be in the country on the Sabbath than in a village. In town I see all around me Sabbath idlers

and the creation of mens' hands, but in the country I see no idlers, and all around me God's handiwork. I can sing as loud and as long as I want without caring for passersby. . . . I have been absent on the Circuit for the past 3 weeks. Although I have been reasonably successful in my cases, yet I have not been fortunate in obtaining much money. The annual Conference is soon to meet in Alligator. I think, after that we will have a stationed preacher here. . . . I am pushing ahead with my building in the country and hope to move out there in a few weeks.

*Jan. 18, 1857.* Bishop Andrews stayed all night with us on way to Alligator.

\* \* \*

[Many of the claims this young attorney was seeking to collect for his clients were claims of persons who had lost property through the depredations of the Indians of Alachua. In his notebook are such memoranda as these :]

Loss of property through hostile Indians

John B. Standley \$4,000.00

Witnesses: G. M. Ellis, F. A. Underwood, Thos. Barrow, Edward Bird

Rebecca Jenkins. . . . 5 head of horses

F. R. Sanchez . . . . . \$125.00

A. Mott . . . . . \$100.00

Witnesses: P. Dell and A. N. Mott

[In the old Alachua County Commissioners records at the courthouse are these entries:] "Jan. 15, 1848. Personally came before me Bennett Dell and after being duly sworn says that he saw a number of Indians lurking near his cowpens and discovered the dwelling house on fire, as well as other buildings at hand. Advancing within 200 paces of

said building he saw a number of Indians around the convening bush.”

For some reason the new railroad did not pass through their village, nor a quarter of a mile away. This sealed the doom of the little town of Newnansville, named for Colonel Daniel Newman, the hero of a fight with the Indians in that part of Florida. And family after family moved away, until only the name remained.]