

1941

## A Letter from Indian Key, 1840

Charles Howe



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A LETTER FROM INDIAN KEY, 1840

Indian Key Novr 8th 1840

Wm H. Fletcher Esqr.  
Escambia County Flor.

My Dear Brother,

I could not write you by our last mail, and I regretted it very much, but the mail Boat having arrived some days before I expected her, & the captain being in a great hurry, allowed me *only* time to close the mail. I received your favor of Augt 13th by the return mail from Key West, *last month*, and I cannot but hope, that I have some gone to Key West by the mail, which I shall probably get when the packet returns- I am happy to say "that we are all in tolerable health at present- our little Amelia has been quite sick since I last wrote & still appears very puny but we trust she will soon become more hearty.

We are now the only family remaining on this island, & your sister the only woman nearer than Key West- Capt H--<sup>1</sup> has cleared out for good- took everything he had left, to Key West, about a fortnight since, to sell at Auction- his Negros- Boats- vessels & & I think I see his object, he is as usual very schemy, he is a good deal in debt & it was thought before the invasion, that he

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*Note* - The writer was Charles Howe who was Inspector of the Port and Postmaster at Indian Key and a survivor of the massacre there three months before the date of this letter. He was also one of the two associates of Dr. Henry Perrine in his noteworthy horticultural enterprise. See this *Quarterly*, v. 38 (July 1926). Grateful acknowledgment is made for a copy of the letter to Dr. H. Bailey Carroll, Professor of History, North Texas Agricultural College.

1. This is Captain Houseman who had established a plantation and other enterprises at Indian Key before the massacre.

could not stand it more than a year or two longer-*had* mortgaged all his property on this island, to two different persons in Charleston, to the amt- of about \$16.000- they were sent to me to have them executed & I could not but feel sorry for the man, notwithstanding his unprincipled disposition- I never mentioned it to anyone, and I believe but one or two besides the clerk of the Co- Court knew of it- he cannot now pay 10 pr ct- and I doubt if he is ever able- he will pay more- - Mr- Goodyear who has been clerk to Capt- H--- for sometime past, kept open a small store, or Grog Shop, on the wharf ever since the destruction of the island, <sup>2</sup> and was surprised when Capt H. came & informed him of his determination to take every thing to Key West & Sell out. Mr- G- said he thought he should return & open a store on his own acct- but I have not heard since he left, whether he intends doing so or not- I must now mention another very serious mis- fortune which I have recently met with- My Scho[oner] Chat & Edward was hauled up at the time of the attack here, within just 20 feet of my new House, as I believe I have before mentioned to you, the House burnt down & she did not take fire notwithstanding the wind blew this fire directly upon her- the Indians had previously striped of her sails awnings &--&-- and finding she did not burn, they set fire to her side just before leaving the island, but it only burnt a small hole, and did not injure her but trifling- I soon had her repaired and put in first rate order in every respect- new sails- Rigging- Awnings &&. Chas Stewart who had charge of her & Wm

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2. This refers to the Indian attack of August 7, the murder of a number of the inhabitants, and the burning of much of the small settlement. See *Massacre at Indian Key . . .* a journal of Hester Perrine Walker, a survivor, in this *Quarterly* v. 18-42 (July 1926).

Wilson than took her & made a trip in the Bay & brought home a fine load of Turtle, - they again left her on the 6th Octor. & was to have returned on the 17" or 18". but not coming at the time appointed, I began to feel uneasy, but waited until the 24th when I was confident something had happened, and addressed a note to Capt Rodgers of the U. S. Schc. Wave which vessel, was than lying here, expressing my fears concerning her fate & those on board, this Gallant & praiseworthy officer immediately started with the forces under his command and after searching for two days with his Boats in the Bay, discovered the Schooner ran ashore in the Mangroves, in Barnses Sound, *Striped* of all her sails, Rigging- Awnings- Turtle Netts- water Kegs- boats- in fact of every individual thing- & Scuttled in two or three places & had been set on fire but did not burn- she had on board about 50 Turtle, some of which would exceed 400th and the barbarous savages had even cut off the heads or more than half of them & they were in a very putrid State- they have all the Turtle overboard, cleaned her out- stoped up the holes where she was scuttled & got her off, and by means of a few Blankets which the men had with them, they managed to rig into a sail & come down here, where they arrived on the 28th- No tidings of the poor fellows on board, but we or course must suppose they were both Massacred by those deamons in human form- She was in a most deplorable state, but I have already had her repaired in the best manner, and have sent for new sails & Rigging, which I expect shortly, & intend again to put her in first rate order, and see if the Indians will get her the third time, as this is the second time they have had her in full possession & endeavored to destroy her, but without success- this last time I have

lost about \$500- She had 4 new Turtle Netts, and they were knitting another, altogether cost me about two hundred. her sails, Rigging, Small Boats- Awnings && cost me three hundred dolls- but I would not think of the loss, if the unfortunate crew were saved-I always have until the last two trips let Peter go with them, but unfortunately I wanted him at home for a short time & this is why he was not on board- I cannot but feel grateful to Capt. Rodgers for this benevolent act- for it is certain, I never should have got the Schooner, had it not been for him, and I am truly thankful that I have saved her. She now stands me in -about \$2.000- and I do not think I would take that for her this day- for I am sure I never should get another her equal-. The Indians are lurking all arround us, a few days since two Turtling Boats were chased by them in the vicinity of Sand Key, near Cape Sable- but they had a good breese & got out of their reach- & returned to Key Vacas and sent an express up here to inform the Troops they report that there was a large body of Indians on Sand Key, and that they had several of the Boats taken from this Key- my Rev- Boat for one, & some of Capt- Housemans were also seen- but I cannot but hope something decisive will be done this winter, as there is now a new General, who spares *none* but hangs them all by the neck- it is also reported here that the whole Squadron from Pensacola is ordered her[e] to cruise among the Keys & along the main- land this winter- whether it is true or not I cannot say- but we now feel as safe on this island & I believe we are more so than at any other place on this coast- for two reasons- 1st. there is no inducement for the Indians to come again. 2d we have a Good Guard of about 20 men & the prospect of more

very shortly, besides several armed vessels most of the time, and the assurance that this post will be kept up as long as the War continues- for this reason your Sister & myself have concluded "that it is best for us to remain here at least for a year or two to come- but . . . [one or two words illegible] know that your sister is very lonely in her present situation- no female associate less than 80 miles distance, and I am sometimes compeled to be from home for several days together, and I shall soon be obliged to send my three eldest children away for schooling, which will make it still more lonesome to her- we have therefore after due reflection, made up our minds, to *Solicit* & to *insist* on your Mothers coming to live with us- While you was single, we could not ask this favour, but as you now have a good helpmate, we do think you ought to be willing to let your mother come to us- that is, if she is willing- & I sincerely hope she will be, and you will please tell her from me, that she *must come*- We think this season of the year her passage will be so short, that she will not suffer much from sea sickness, and when she arrives at Key West, there will be no difficulty in getting a passage here, as there is opportunities almost any day. She will however stop at Mrs Mallorys, until a good one offers- or if I hear of her arrival I will . . . [one line illegible] *dollar Note* to defray her expenses, and should it not be sufficient, when she arrives at Key West, she is only to speak to Mr Mallory,<sup>3</sup> who will advance her as much as she wishes, I will write him upon the subject I do wish most sincerely I could prevail on you & your Good Lady to accompany her. Your Sister & myself have both endeavoured to think of something you might do

3. Stephen R. Mallory, later U.S. senator from Florida, and Secretary of the Navy of the Confederacy.

to advantage, but the prospect appears dull & we are afraid to advise, but one thing I would say "that you shall have a home with us, if you can put up with our fare as long as we remain here, and then wherever we conclude to locate, we can all go together- - if I was sure the war would end this winter, of which I have now some faint hope, I would certainly advise you to come, for I believe we should find a spot in this country, that we could not help but be delighted with, and I think we could be a *help* to each other in getting underway- Tell your mother, that we have already commenced preparing for her reception and she must not dissappoint us, even if you cannot come with her- Your Sister writes her by this mail- - I hope when the mail Boat returns I shall have letters from you- - I must now close- Your sister & the children all join in kind Remembrance to you & family- Sincerely wishing you every blessing this world can afford-

I remain very truly your fr. & Brother

**CHAS. HOWE**

P.S. Nov-15 I cannot get a fifty dollar note and therefore am obliged to enclose 2 dubloons @ 17-\$34- 1 Sovereigns 5- the balance in paper which makes \$50-