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Olin Norwood

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LETTERS FROM FLORIDA IN 1851

Edited by OLIN NORWOOD

Clement Claiborne Clay, 1816-1886, was a son of Governor Clement Comer Clay of Alabama. He was a lawyer by profession, and in 1851 was a county judge. Two years later he was elected to the U. S. Senate, where he served until the outbreak of the Civil War. He declined to be the first Confederate Secretary of War, but was a Confederate senator from 1861 until 1863. In 1864 he undertook a highly secret mission to Canada on behalf of the Confederacy, the results of which are still not completely known. He was accused of participating in the conspiracy to assassinate Lincoln, and spent over a year in solitary confinement at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Through the efforts of his wife, Virginia Caroline (Tunstall) Clay, he was released by President Johnson in 1866. After his release from prison he retired from public life.

In 1851, Clay went to Florida in company with Dr. John Young Bassett, both from Huntsville, Alabama: They went seeking to regain their health, for they both were suffering from some bronchial condition. The trip seems to have been of little aid to Dr. Young, however, for he died soon after returning home.

While they were in Florida, Clay wrote several letters and Young wrote one letter to Clay, which give an uncommon and interesting picture of the Florida scene in 1851. The letters follow.

(Clement Claiborne Clay to Clement Comer Clay)

Jacksonville, E. Florida., Sunday, February 16, 1851.

My Dear Father: On Tuesday the 11th inst., we left Savannah in the steamer *Gaston*, & reached here on Wednesday afternoon. We stopped at St. Marys awhile, & I went into the town to see brother L[awton]'s¹ friend, Capt.

¹The Quarterly and its readers express their appreciation of the interest and value of these letters, and their thanks for permission to publish them, to Duke University Library, where they were found and transcribed by Mr. Norwood, a native of Florida and a member of the staff of that Library. They are in the Clement Claiborne Clay Papers of the Library.

1. Hugh Lawton Clay.

Clarke, but he was at Waynesville. I sealed the introductory letter I bore from brother L[awton] and left it in the care of a merchant for him. Our course was thru inlets & sounds & across creeks & rivers, wh[ich] are not named on the maps, & sometimes, out at sea, but in sight of the coast. The sea was quite rough, especially in crossing the bars off the mouths of the St. Marys & St. Johns rivers; insomuch, that all the ladies & many of the men aboard were very seasick. Dr. B[asset]² & others who had travelled on seas frequently were obliged to take to their births [*sic*] to escape sickness.-Tho' we had no storm, the wind was high, & the waves rolled like hills, sometimes striking the sides of the vessel so heavily as to throw us out of our chairs. I spent most of the time on the upper deck holding fast to the wheel-house or a beam, ineffectually courting seasickness & unconscious of danger, while the ladies & some men were crying or moaning in the cabins, in agonizing dread of being wrecked. Dr. B [assett] told me the spectacle in the cabins was truly painful to him-the more so, I suspect, because of his own apprehensions of his personal danger.-But, thank God, we reached here unhurt, & found a very comfortable hotel & a pleasant room.-The weather would have been very pleasant, but for slight rains on Thursday & today, which have kept us in the house; the thermometer never falling below 65°, nor rising above 75°. We are assured, however, that there has been more rain & cold weather here this winter, than has been known since 1835, when most of their orange trees were killed.-The house has been pleasant enough without fire, &, indeed, except when exposed to the north-easterly wind, I have found the air warm enough out of doors.-But, we are not far enough inland, to escape the raw air that comes from the sea, & are determined to leave here today or tomorrow for St. Augustine, where, for the same reasons, we shall only remain a few days, & then shall turn our faces towards Tampa Bay, stopping awhile at Orange Springs,

2. Dr. John Young Bassett, 1805-1851.

wh[ich] are [sic] near the middle of the State.-This place, & particularly this hotel, is filled with invalids-a spectral assemblage of bronchial & consumptive patients, some of whom will be buried here very soon.-The pale, gaunt & bloodless figures that I meet in my walks might alarm me, if my mirror & all who see me did not assure me that I exhibit none of their indications of disease.-Like all the fondly hoping victims of that flattering destroyer, not one will admit that his lungs are seriously implicated, altho' he is now ripe for the grave & his colorless, feeble & emaciated frame might be mistaken for a corpse, but for the heaving of his chest while he labors to inspire the vital air.-The grave yard, like the hotel, is filled with strangers.—I am truly glad I have come here ere my disease has assumed an alarming aspect.-I feel very confident that I shall be greatly benefitted, if not cured. I have formed, among other pleasant acquaintances, that of a Dr. Holland, who bears a very high reputation here, & who, at Dr. B[asset]t's request, examined my throat & chest very carefully. He says my lungs are as sound as anyone's & my cough proceeds entirely from the inflammation of the' epi-glottis ; wh [ich] he thinks looks like it was improving. Dr. B[asset]t says it looks 50 pr. ct. better than it did before I left home. I think I cough less & feel as well as I ever did.-If care & prudence & exercise & energy will avail, I shall get well.—I sent my umbrella home by Jno. Patton, because it was in my way & I don't intend to need it,-for I will not go out of doors in rainy or damp weather,-Dr. B[asset]t thinks he is doing very well & I trust he is not deceived.-I am obliged to Mr. Cruse for his letter to Mr. Locke.-He was very agreeable & attentive, & gave us a very kind letter introductory to Capt. Casey, U.S.A.,³ commanding post at Tampa Bay.—We found Mr. Sadler (Mr. Shanklin's father-in-law) on board the *Gaston*, & gave him the letter Mr. Shanklin gave us at Macon. He was very kind & invited us to spend a day with him, but as we would have

3. Capt. John C. Casey, U. S. Army.

to cross the St. Johns, wh[ich] is very broad here, we will not visit him.—I have met in this hotel, Mrs. Downing (widow of the member of congress)“, aunt of Mrs. Bierne, who offered me letters to her friends at several points,—Col. Hackett,” a member of Congress from the Rome dist. of Ga. (who tells me, when he left Washington in Dec. last, Jeremiah Clemons⁶ had become so puffed up that his clothes could hardly hold him & that he swallows not less than a quart of liquor daily & is growing as contemptible in public opinion as he deserves to be), & many yankees from all parts of the north.—The sand here is thirty feet deep,—the country level & covered with evergreens & flowers,—scarce a deciduous tree or plant being found—& the water is pure free stone.—The common growth is the pine, liveoak, the magnolia, the palmetto, & a species of evergreen tree called the water oak.—The aloe, acacia, japonica, hydrangea, & numberless other rare hot-house flowers with us, are seen in the gardens of this place.

[*Jacksonville*]

—Jacksonville is badly built of framed houses, has many churches,—Episcopalian, Methodist, Babtist, [*sic*] Presbyterian, & Roman Catholic—& contains about 1200 inhabitants. *Owing* to the convenient way by water of getting to & from it & its better hotels than are found in most, other places in Florida, it is more frequented by invalids than, perhaps, any other point.—It is a busy & thriving place, of a good deal of trade, & accessible to ships of the 2nd class. The St. Johns is a broad, sluggish stream, frequently widening into lakes, & navigated in large steamboats as high up as Monroe Lake, wh[ich] is 200 miles south of this.—Altho' there are orange trees in every quarter of the town, they do not mature the fruit: they were cut down in '35 by the frost & for 11 years past have

4. Charles Downing. ?—1845, a St. Augustine lawyer, and territorial delegate to U. S. Congress, 1837-1841.

5. Thomas C. Hackett, ?-1851, U. S. Congressman from Georgia, 1849-1851.

6. Jeremiah Clemens, 1814-1865, U. S. Senator from Alabama.

been ravaged by an insect.-The oranges here were grown about Lake Monroe.-We have not purchased horses, because we have found them very high; little marsh ponies, that are in form something between the alligator and the hog called *landshark*, commanding from 50 to 100 dollars,-We shall defer buying till we get where they are lower in price.-[mutilated] o'clock p. m. It ceased raining about noon & has turned quite cool,-the thermometer having fallen to 54°,-16° since morning.-We shall probably get off at 9 a. m. tomorrow, &, as the boat wh[ich] carries us up will, on its return, carry the first mail from here to Savannah, I shall stop here, & conclude tomorrow.

Monday Morning, Feby 17.—We will be off on a boat for Enterprise, on Lake Monroe, in one hour. We have concluded to go there before visiting St. Augustine, as it is 100 miles further South, & the thermometer is down to 46" this morning. Too cold for us & we'll go 2" farther South. No letter yet from home-& scarcely expect any, as the mails are uncertain here. Write to Orange Springs, Fla. Love to all-take care of my boy-send this over to Virginia when read-& believe me your affect. Son. C. C. Clay, Jr.

P. S. Tell Va. to read this to Mrs. & Miss Bassett.-I'll write again in a week.

(Clement *Claiborne* Clay to *Hugh* Lawson. Clay)

Tampa, Fla., Saturday, March 15, /51

My Dear Brother: I reached here today at noon,—having left Lake Monroe on Wednesday at 12 meridian. I overtook the postman & rode with him,—& felt myself fortunate in having a guide.-We followed the Indian trail, wh[ich] was sometimes entirely hidden from my eyes by the high palmetto shrub, wh[ich] had spread its broad leaves across it. For the first thirty odd miles we traversed an unvaried plain, covered with a sparse pine growth & stunted palmetto shrub, & with but two settlements upon it separated by twenty miles.-Then we encountered the sand hills, wh[ich] run almost due north &

south thro the middle of the state, & wh[ich] are about 25 miles in breadth, & are covered with a stunted growth of pine & oak & deep white sand.-They are low & of very gentle inclinations, & look very like potato hills.—I tho't I could almost see over them from my horse's back.—After descending from the hills, we again found the singularly level land wh [ich] prevails in this state.—

[“*Lakeland*” in 1851]

Throughout the trip I saw little lakes of clear & pure water at short distances apart,-many of them united by a little stream of water. And I have never seen or believed there was a country in wh[ich] there was so many lakes-it might be called “Lake-land” with as much reason as “Flower-land.”—I was not, I believe, out of sight of a lake for a mile's length during the trip. For 65 miles of the distance I saw no human habitation, & no sign of man save a single foot-print, wh[ich] I fancied might be that of an Indian. Of course, I had to bivouac in the woods, wh[ich] I found very pleasant & attended with no bad effects. I did not cough more than in the house or take any cold. The postman, being accustomed to camping, was *au fait* at the business.-We kindled a fire against a pine log, convenient to water, hobbled our horses & let them graze, gathered some palmetto leaves, on wh[ich] we spread our saddle blankets, & stretching ourselves with our feet to the fire slept with our clothes on (& I enveloped in your Mexican blanket) very soundly & comfortably. On rising just before day we heard the wild turkeys gobbling in the thick woods on the water's edge near us, in concert with the whooping of the red-head cranes & the hooting of the owls.-Looking around us we could not discover either of our horses, &, notwithstanding the assurance of Mr. Lowry that he had hobbled them securely & that they could not travel far with their legs tied, I felt very uncomfortable, or, as Jack Downing⁷ would say, *all overish*.—In the midst of the

7. *Jack Downing*, pseudonym of Seba Smith, 1792-1862, American satirist.

wilderness, thirty-two miles from any human dwelling, with my saddle-bags & saddle to carry or leave behind me & my horse gone, I was *fixed* for slow *travelling*.—But Mr. L[owry] (the postman) found them in twenty minutes at the distance of about 250 yards, feeding together on a *new-burn*; that is the young grass that had lately sprung up in a spot that he had burnt the old grass off of a short time before when camping there; & after cooking & eating our breakfast & feeding the horses, we mounted them & pursued our journey thro' the forest. We passed many deer & turkeys, some within pistol shot,--& innumerable partridges & various water birds, & many wolf & panther tracks. I find the panther universally called tiger here.

[*The Scrub*]

Our trip was between the head waters of the rivers that run into the Gulf of Mexico & Lake Okechubee [sic] thro' the most open woods & over the most arid & sterile ground in the world. The novelty of the trip, the strange wild scenery & the numerous wild birds & beasts, kept me constantly excited & looking ahead, & made me ample compensation for the dullness of my ignorant, tho' good natured fellow traveller.—I am not at all surprised at the exceedingly tedious, expensive & unsuccessful war with the Seminoles, when I consider the face of the country & the character of its growth & lands. It is generally exceedingly poor & covered with a very sparse pine woods, so open that you may see a man or deer for half a mile; but studded all over with lakes & hammocks of live oak & bogs of miry land, wh[ich] obstruct your progress almost every mile in any direct line; while the hammocks & the undergrowth about the lakes are frequently so thick as to hide a man securely, tho' you should pass in 10 feet of him. An Indian who knew the country well might escape from 10,000 whites who were not as familiar with it. Then, besides the game with wh[ich] the waters & wood abound, the wild potato & arrowroot

& orange & other vegetables & fruits, wh[ich] grow spontaneously, furnish subsistence in almost any part of the state to the savage who knows where to find them.

[Tampa, 1851]

Sunday 16. March. I am comfortably fixed at a Mr. Carter's boarding house, where I found an invalid from Green Co., Ala., named Meadows.-There are some twenty invalids sojourning here till warm weather begins at home, besides many who are making this their homes on account of their diseased lungs. Tampa is a little village of about two hundred inhabitants, exclusive of the soldiers in the barracks, is the county seat of Hillsboro' county, & situated on the mouth of the river of that name, wh[ich] empties into Tampa Bay.-It is badly improved & scattered over a white sand plain & would be intolerably hot if it was not almost constantly fanned by the balmy & soft Gulf breeze.-The oysters caught in the bay of Tampa are larger & finer than any I ever saw; & of choice- fish there is a great variety.-I have seen but little fruit there, because of the idleness & ignorance of the people who have done less for themselves than a Yankee would do in six months-I have not been inspired by the muse or reminded of any of the poetic associations so beautifully portrayed in Mr. Wilde's^s poem, by anything seen on Tampa's sandy.-The most interesting place here is the old barracks, established in 1822 [?] wh[ich] stretch along the shore of the river & near one end of wh[ich] rises on Indian mound, the summit of wh[ich] is crowned with a summer house, wh[ich] serves as a cool retreat & an observatory for the officers. I was introduced yesterday evening to Capt. Casey of the U. S. Army, commanding this post & acting as Indian Agent for the government, & delivered to him the letter which Mr. J. L. Locke of Savannah was so kind as to give me. I was very politely treated by him, & he called on me this morning & invited me to dine with him today

S. Perhaps Richard Henry Wilde, 1789-1847, Georgia poet and U. S. Congressman.

at his own house & lives, I am told, better than anyone else in Tampa. He entertained me with recitals of his talks with Sam Jones & Bully Bowlegs, the Seminole Chiefs, who refuse to emigrate & defy the gov't.-The Capt. rides a black Mexican pony, wh[ich] he had bro't over last year, & wh[ich] I fancied might be your *Pet*. -I wrote to brother W. from Enterprize, on the 11th & 12th insts.-explaining how & happened to mention to a Mr. Starke my desire to visit this place on horseback, & his sending me a horse, wh[ich] he said a negro boy of his, that I would find here, would ride back.-The boy had left on foot & by another route than the one I travelled, when I reached here, & there is no chance for me to get the horse back save by the post-rider, who objects to leading her, as the trail is narrow & only allows of single file travelling.—As I can purchase the mare I rode for 80\$ & she is the cheapest horse I have found in Fla., I think I shall keep her.-Dr. B[assett] is now at Orange Springs, 125 miles from here,-whither I shall go & join him in about a week. My face will then be turned homeward & I expect I shall keep moving in that direction.-I expected to receive a letter here, but am disappointed.-I wrote from St. Augustine to my beloved wife to address me here; but she did not get my letter or her answer has miscarried; for I know she has not neglected me.-I recd. her first letter to me, dated 8th Febry, just before I left Enterprize-that is the only intelligence I have had from home since I left there.-I trust in God you are all well, but I should like to know it.—I have written 4 letters to my dear wife, 1 to father, 1 to mother, 1 to brother W. & this to you makes my 8th letter home. I mention this that you may know that I write at least once a week, & it is the fault of the mails if you don't hear from me that often.—My throat is certainly getting well, for my cough has almost ceased.-I weigh 139 lbs., without my coat & am as hearty as a plowman-I hope you did your & my talking in all of our cases in Madison & Marshall & succeeded well; but no matter how badly you may have failed don't

give it up,-' 'cut & come again," & you'll succeed after a while. You & brother W. must take more exercise & sit up & read less at night, or you'll *soon* break down your health. If you would rise & walk before breakfast & ride on horseback every evening you might save yourself much suffering & loss of time. Write me to Pensacola immediately on rect. of this & let me know all about result of our cares,-my cotton—the news generally etc. I shall write in a few days to my dear Jeanie.—I hope you & she-ride on horseback together daily & that she is getting quite fat. Pa's boy I fear is imposed on in my absence.—Give my love to all & believe me most affectionally your brother, C. C. Clay, Jr. Dr. B[assett] is greatly improved, I think.-Let his family know it.

(*Clement Claiborne Clay to Dr. John Young Bassett*)

Tampa, E. Fla., Sunday, March 16/51

Dear Doctor: I address you by the first mail after my arrival here according to promise ; &, as I am assured this will reach Orange Springs on Tuesday morning, I shall send it to that place,-hoping it will meet you there, as I suppose you will not have left at that time.—I arrived here on yesterday at one o'clock, improved I think by my trip. Altho' my route was an Indian trail, thro' a wilderness, whose solitude was such as Zimmerman' might have envied & whose "boundless contiguity of shade" might have afforded a "lodge" for Thompson,¹⁰ yet it was interesting & exciting to one accustomed only to the busy haunts of men.-My rides were somewhat fatiguing, but they secured me two of the greatest comforts of life, a keen appetite & sound sleep. The Epicure never enjoyed a feast with as much relish as I did my potatoes, water crackers & dried beef; & the Sybarite¹¹

9. Probably Johann Georg Von Zimmerman, 1728-1795, Swiss Philosopher.

10. Probably David Thompson, 1770-1857. Canadian explorer and writer.

11. An inhabitant of the Greek city of Sybaris in Southern Italy noted for luxury and pleasure.

never reposed so well on swan's down & roses as I did on my blanket & mother earth. But more of this anon.—Tampa is a poor little village, without any object of interest save the Indian mounds & old barracks.—The air is soft & balmy & freshened by an almost perpetual sea-breeze.—Capt. Casey is very intelligent & sociable,—has been very polite & attentive—I dined with him today.—The oysters here are the largest & finest I ever ate.—The mare I got of Mr. Starke did not perform very well, yet I find horses so high here, that I think I shall keep her, as his boy had left here on foot for Beresford, via Palatka, when I arrived, & the postman tho't he could not get her back until the next trip.—I shall probably stay till Sunday next, 25 inst. & reach Orange Springs by the 25th or 26th—&, if I do not find you there, go on in a day or two to Newnansville, & if you are not there, thence to Tallahassee.—If you receive this, drop a line in reply to this point forthwith & get it mailed & I'll receive it on Saturday night next.—I'll send a duplicate of this to Newnansville &, perhaps, a triplicate to Tallahassee,—if you get this let those alone.

Hoping yr. health is improving & that we may meet soon, I am

Faithfully, yr. friend,

C. C. Clay, Jr.

Send my letter at Orange for me to this place, if you mail it for return mail.

*(Clement Claiborne Clay to Virginia Caroline
[Tunstall] Clay)*

Tampa, E. Fla., Wednesday, March 19, 1851

My Dear Wife: I wrote to brother L[awson] Sunday 16th, giving an account of my novel & interesting trip across the peninsular & of the appearance of things there. Nothing has occurred of much interest since Sunday, but I can not let the mail of tonight go without a short talk with my much beloved. Here I am seated alone in a little parlor about 10 by 14 feet, whose floor is covered by a

single ply Yankee carpet & wh[ich] is furnished with a round pine centre table, ½ doz. wicker-bottom chairs, a rocking chair & home made lounge, covered with calico, a steel engraving of James K. Polk, & a few large sea shells.-It is one of the best furnished houses I have seen in Fla.-Its owner, Mr. Carter & wife & three children, a Mr. Meadows, from Ala. (Greene co.), a Mr. Coleman, from Louisiana, & myself, constitute the household. My room & bed are comfortable & "mine host" very polite & obliging, but his wife is ignorant of the culinary art & our fare is just tolerable,-saving the stale light bread wh[ich] comes from a baker's & is always good. The family cow only comes up to be milked occasionally, so that I have to drink water,-as I will not use tea or coffee.—Tampa is the common resort of invalids from Ala., Miss., & La., & there are several from our state here; none of my acquaintance. I found living a few miles from here Parson Rowe, of Monte-sano, corn-crushing & other machine memories, & in this town a Mr. Wilson, a school teacher, formerly of North Tuscaloosa.--He & his wife, (who was a Miss Cunningham,-a Tartar [?] stock) quarrelled the other day & separated,-she crossing the Hillsboro' river, so as to make him take water if he followed her, I suppose.-They have no church in this benighted town; whoever chooses may preach in the court house, where I'm told they have service twice a month. The sand here is nearly pure silex, & clean & abundant enough to supply all the stationers on earth to the end of time.-It is painful to my eyes to look on it after sunrise, it is so white & glistening.-Save the fish & oysters in the bay, wh[ich] are very abundant, & the deer in the woods wh[ich] are quite numerous, there is no thing, that I have discovered, to induce one to settle here.-The oysters are the largest & finest I ever saw & in exhaustless banks. The lands for miles around are as arid & sterile as Arabian deserts, & the Hillsboro' river, at whose mouth Tampa is situated, is a little narrow & short stream, navigable only ten miles up, & only used to trans-

port timber for foreign markets.-The only amusements of the town are 10 pins, hunting, fishing & sailing; of wh[ich] I am surprised to find sailing most popular.-I have heard of some invalids here who spent more than half their days on little sail boats & never reached home after one excursion on the water without being wet to their waists from the spray or from wading to push their boats off of bars.-Yet I am told they returned home greatly improved-despite of the water I suppose.-I am satisfied that there is wonderful virtue in this climate.— I find men here apparently with sufficient flesh & good health, who tell me they came here a few months or years since, mere skeletons, with hectic fever & with frequent hemorrhages.-The most interesting & agreeable man I have met in Fla. is Capt. Jno. C. Casey, of the U.S.A. & Indian Agent, for this State, who, tho' looking quite well, tells me he is breathing with but one lung; that when landed here three years ago he was carried in the arms of his servant, greatly emaciated from hectic fever & profuse hemorrhages, & not expected to live a month.— He says that many cases of as remarkable recuperation, have come under his observation here, & thinks all attributable to the sanatory influence of the climate.-The bay of Tampa is a broad & beautiful sheet of water, having an excellent harbor & capable of floating all the navies of the world; but Hillsboro' bay (on wh[ich] the town of Tampa is situated) is small, shallow & of difficult navigation. I can't imagine why the garrison & town were located here instead of at the head of Tampa bay, on which is a high bluff, commanding an extensive view, & where there are some fertile lands.-On the invitation of Capt. Casey I accompanied a party yesterday on board the Government Steamer, *Col. Clay*, wh[ich] started on a pleasure trip to the head of Tampa bay, but as the wind was blowing hard from the north & we had sixty miles to go, the Capt. halted in about twenty five miles of our destination, &, after stopping long enough to catch two barrels of oysters, we turned back & reached the wharf just

before dark. So I was disappointed in not seeing the head bluffs of old Tampa & the orange groves of Mons. Philippi, a Frenchman & native of St. Domingo, about the color of Alfred,¹²—who was anxious to extend to us his hospitality. We had a good dinner & agreeable company, composed of Gen. Childs,¹³ Capt. Casey, Lieuts., Everett & Potter¹⁴, Drs. Sloan & Mickle, etc. etc., & Mrs. Sloan, Mrs. Duke & Miss Wilson, formerly of Tuscaloosa, & very much like Sallie Learne.—I was the honored guest of the day &, as such, placed between Genl. & Capt.—These army officers are generous, open-handed fellows, who spare no pains or expense in making yr. time pass pleasantly, if they take a liking to you.—I am looking anxiously for a letter to night, & shall be greatly disappointed if I don't get one. I shall wait here till the 23rd or 24th & then set out for Orange Springs to join Dr. Bassett.—Thence we will go, via Newnansville, to Tallahassee, Quincey [sic] & Pensacola. I shall be in the saddle almost daily from the 24th till I reach home,—wh[ich] will require from 20 to 30 days travelling.—I shall thus prove the virtue of horseback exercise, if, indeed, I do not find myself entirely well before I get out of Fla., wh[ich], I trust, will take me home, if there be any trust in the saying, "the gray mare's the better horse." She walks & canters delightfully & will just suit for your pleasure rides.—It is said that the last three or four months in Fla. have been unusually wet & cold : yet I have only kept within doors two days by rain & then it was a mere sprinkling wh [ich] would not have stopped any well man, & the thermometer has been generally at 80° at noon. The nights I have always found cool as to require one or more blankets.—I found most of our garden vegetables ripe when I reached Fla., more than a month since,—such as peas, cabbage, irish potatoes, etc.,—& some that we do not grow, such as cauliflower, broccoli, etc.—The peo-

12. C. C. Clay, Jr.'s house slave.

13. Brigadier-General Thomas Childs, a veteran of the Seminole and Mexican wars.

14. Joseph Hayden Potter, later, Brigadier-General, U. S. A.

ple of this "flowerland" are like the butterflies that flit from blossom to blossom,-they evince no foretho't or providence.-They are indolent & inert, & do little for themselves. A more worthless & ignorant & artless population cannot be found in the Union. . . . I trust you continue our habit of early rising, bathing & walking, & avoid exposure at night. We never appreciate health properly till we are sick.—I know its value & wish you & my brothers esteemed it as I do ;-I think you would not soon lose it.-They sit up & read too late at night & exercise too little.—I fear they will not hold out long, unless they ride & walk more & go to bed earlier. I trust you will impress good habits on *pa's* boy,-especially teach him the importance of sleeping in dry sheets, of wh [ich] you were kind enough to forewarn me in your letter of the 8th inst.-Speaking of the ignorance of these *cowdrivers* (as the frontier settlers are called, because of their habit of hunting & driving cattle, wh[ich] constitute their fortune & are as much their currency as tobacco used to be in Revolutionary days in old Va.) reminds of my guide, the post-man, asking me what a "Pressbattery" was, saying that Parson Bright come over the word a *heap* of times in a sermon he preached at Limmon's hammock, & that Mr. Rowe (who was a mechanic) & Mr. Clarke (a school master) had a dispute about its meaning,-Mr. Rowe contending it was a machine for *grinding* sugar & Mr. C[larke] that it was a machine for *killing Injans*.—I explained to him that the pious preacher miscalled the word,-that it was *Presbytery*, an assembly of Elders of the Presbyterian church, to make rules for church govt. etc.-He was not so much surprized at the meaning of the word, as at the mistake of the schoolmaster, of whom the neighborhood, like that described by Goldsmith, wondered, "that one small head could hold all that he knew."—This is a fact-brother W. [John Withers Clay, editor] may put, it in *The Democrat* on my authority.-You must have cold weather-for the wind has been blowing from the north since yesterday

morning & it is quite cool here,-thermometer 51" before sunrise. My love to all-kisses for children.-God grant we may soon meet in health, my dear, darling wife. Yrs. till death, C. C. Clay, Jr. _____

(*John Young Bassett to Clement Claiborne Clay*)

Newnansville 23d March 1851

C. C. Clay Jr. Esq.

Dr. Sir:

Yours from Tampa of 11th inst. is before me and I am before the postoffice in the buggy of a friend, and why should I not write from a 'buggy if Stern [sic]¹⁵ wrote from a diligence?¹⁶ Besides it gives me an opportunity of being as classic as yourself.

If you come to Ocala in the stage you³ will find a man named Gieger who will porte you in a hurry to this place for \$5-1 met with him at Orange Springs going home empty I was induced to leave much sooner than I desired on acct. of this chance of getting through more comfortably than by public stage & found it so.

I am staying here in the country with Mr. Piles & Mrs. Dell & here learned the death of Sister from Mrs. D. which took place about 10th inst. This was somewhat unexpected tome I had hoped she would survive until my return, it has been ordered otherwise; I am anxious to get to Tallahassee for letters but am waiting here until the last of this week, say about Thursday when I will go to Aligator¹⁷ thence to the lower Suwanney [sic] Springs 8 miles, thence to the Upper Springs on same river about 20 miles where you will overtake me-My health is improving Certainly, at Ocala you will stop at Pains-at Micanopy—Stoughtons at Newnansville, Galphin 's *no t at Mrs. Stanley's* as, you will be directed-here Dr. Dell will inform you whether I have left with Mr. Piles or not.

I am Dr Sir respectfully

John Y. Bassett

15. Perhaps Lawrence Sterne, 1713-1768, British author. Wrote "Tristram Shandy."

16. Eighteenth century stagecoach.

17. Lake City.

(*Clement Claiborne Clay to Virginia C.
[Tuns tall] Clay*)

Lake Lindsay, (Col. Pearson's) Fla.

Thursday, March 27th, 1851

My Dear Wife:-Not a word from home, since your first of 8th Febry.,—altho' I have been absent nearly two months!-I still trust it is the fault of Govt. agents, yet I am getting uneasy & shall, probably, turn my face homeward tomorrow, in hopes of meeting letters at Orange Springs or Tallahassee.-We have had a week of the coolest weather I have felt in Fla.,-the mercury at 40" in the morning.-I have not improved so much in consequence of the change of air, but I trust am getting no worse.-If I would only hear from you & learn that all are well, I am sure I would feel better for a week. I fear my letters too, miscarry, & that you are troubled about me.-Hence, I repeat that I have written to father once, mother once, & to my brothers each once, & to my darling wife six times.-So, if you get this, you'll know that you are not neglected.-At Tampa, (wh[ich] is 45 miles south of this) I met with Col. Byrd M. Pearson, (of Nashville Convention & the Episcopal Fair memory) who invited me to accompany him home.-Accordingly I left Tampa on the 23rd inst. & rode up here in his buggy,-his servant riding my horse. We reached here on the 24th inst., & found the Col.'s wife & 4 children & their teacher, (Mrs. Marlow) looking out for us & keeping the dinner table waiting. At the distance of a mile from the dwelling we commenced ascending a hill, wh[ich] rises like a sugar loaf from the flat lands below & whose summit is crowned with orange, lemon & fig trees, wh[ich] quite conceal the comfortable log cabins.—From this hill I command the finest prospect to be seen in Fla.-At the foot of the hill on the northwestern side, is Lake Lindsey (called after Col. Lindsey, who died at Mr. Lewis' & who, in command of the Alabama volunteers & some U. S. dragoons, encamped near it for some weeks in 1836—Mr. Camp & his father were here), while at the distance of several miles

is the Weethlokkoochee [sic] river (whose banks were so fiercely contested with Gen. Gaines & Gen. Clinch in 1836 by Oseeola & his savage warriors), the Homossassa (or pepper ground) & other lesser streams, may be marked by the growth of trees on their banks; on the west extends of the Nutkaliga & on the south the Chuckachatee hammocks (the finest lands I ever saw) & on the east the Charlieoppa lake,-a large & beautiful sheet of water.-It is one of the most beautiful spots in Fla. or the world, & commands a more extensive view than I had tho't was to be found in this state.-The Col. grows sugar & tobacco in great perfection, & has every facility for agricultural productions that a rich soil & genial climate afford.-It is however cut off from good society &, hence,, very irksome.-They have been very kind & attentive to me & have given me the best bed & table I have found in my travels.-Col. P[earson] speaks in terms of great admiration of you and brother, & Mrs. P[earson] regrets that you are not here, as she feels well acquainted with you from the frequent mention made of you by Col. P[earson] & me. I shall regret leaving them & would remain longer, as I am pressed to do, if I could hear from h o m e .

I hope to overtake Dr. Bassett at Newnansville.¹⁸—I have not heard from him since we parted two weeks since.

I am in great haste for the mail, & have not time to add more to this straggling & ill-constructed epistle.-It is the only short letter I have written home-& must, therefore, be excused for not being more communicative & interesting. Col. P[earson] & a client have been talking in the room, so that I have had my tho'ts constantly diverted. If you have recd. my other letters, the poverty of this will be pardoned. My love to all & believe me, as ever since we met as man & woman, constant & devoted love-& for eight years kind husband, also— C. C. Clay, Jr.
Mrs. Virginia C. Clay.

N. B. I shall try to write from Ocala in a few days &

18. Near Alachua.

will try 'to be more interesting. Kiss my darling niece & nephew & pa's boy.—I think I must write him shortly about the pretty birds & flowers & an "old wolf" that barked at pa, & many other interesting events too tedious to mention now. I shall not forget uncle's daughter, . . . her heart & bright eyes. God bless & protect you my jewel.

C. C. C. Jr.

(*Clement Claiborne Clay, to his wife
Virginia Carol&e [Tunstall] Clay*)

Suwannee Springs,¹⁹ E. Fla., April 6/51.

My Darling wife : I am now at the spot recommended to me for a winter's sojourn by Thos. Butler King, last fall on our way home,—as you may remember. It is a beautiful place, on the Suwannee River, in Columbia Co. 90 miles east of Tallahassee & 90 ms. west of Jacksonville.—The water is sulphur, rises from a natural basin or well in the rock, immediately on the bank of the river, & rises rapidly over a scalloped place or sort of mouth on one side of the stone basin into the Suwannee.—It is a singular & rather wonderful spring of water, so clear & limpid that you could see a pin at the bottom, altho it is more than 20 feet deep.—The houses are comfortable & capable of accommodating about 100 visitors.—The table is the best I have sat down to in Fla., excepting Mrs. Pierson's [sic] (whence I last addressed you a hurried letter),—wh[ich] was one of the best I ever feasted at.—I wish I could have *mailed* you some of her buckwheat cakes and jelly [?] as hot on the table, Mrs. Bevine and Cruse could not beat them. And then her gopher gumbo made me think of your appetizing accounts of that luxury of the planters & their negroes in So. Ala.—She & the Col. & Mrs. Marlow (their governess -for the children) were so kind & attentive to me that I left there with great, reluctance, &, but for my anxiety to hear from home & to overtake Dr. B[asset] should probably have accepted their pressing invitation to remain a week longer under'

19. White Springs.

their roof. I left there on Monday last, the 31st ult., in company with a Mr. Henry G. Gignilliat, [?] of Bethel, Glynn co., Ga., who travelled in a sulky. We exchanged, occasionally, during our two days travel together, wh[ic]h was mutually agreeable. We reached Ocala, Marion Co., 52 miles above Lake Lindsey & 152 above Tampa, on Tuesday 1st ins. to dinner. Thence I wrote to father. -1 met there a letter from Dr. B[assett] written from Newnansville, in Alachua Co., advising me that he would come on here and await my arrival.—On Wednesday I left Ocala & Mr. Gignilliat [?] & came to Orange Lake, to the house of Mr. Paul McCormick, to whom I bore a letter of introduction from Capt. D. Provencé, of Ocala, to whom (as well as to Col. C.A.M. Mitchell, the author of the “Legend of Silver Spring” who knew sister Mary when here) I was introduced by letter from Col. Pierson [sic]. At Mr. McC’s I spent a pleasant night in company with the old gentleman and his only daughter, his wife having left him a widower last fall. I spent an hour in the orange grove on the banks of the lake, indulging my appetite ad *libitum* on the delicious fruit, & wishing I could throw every one I plucked into my dear wife’s lap. I was pressed to remain longer, but left on Thursday morning & reached Newnansville that night. There I saw Dr. J. Gadsden Dell (Sophy Lane’s cousin whom you may remember) who invited me to his house, told me Dr. Bassett had improved very much, that Mrs. Francis Dell was at her brother-in-law’s, Mr. Sam’l Piles’, about 3 miles out of my way to this place, & pressed me to go there & take dinner. I left there Friday morning & reached Alligator, in Columbia Co. that night. There I called to see Mr. Jas. Lane (brother of Genl. B. M. Lane) but he was in the woods cattle hunting. I wished to learn of him whether I would find the Dr. here, as he had brought him hither in his buggy. I left Alligator yesterday morning & reached here yesterday afternoon. The Dr. had left on Friday morning for Tallahassee in the stage. Today being Sunday I shall rest & renew my pursuit of him -tomorrow, but

as I may stop awhile at Judge McGehee's²⁰ or Mr. Van Randal's (to whom I bear letters from Col. Pierson & Mrs. Pierson [sic] I begin to doubt whether I shall overhaul the little man this side of Huntsville. I omitted to say that I missed the way to Mr. Pile's & only found it out when 3 miles this side of his house, & hence failed to see Mrs. Dell, wh[ic]h I wish you would request Miss' Sophy Lane to mention to her in her next, letter, as I told Dr. Dell I should go by and see her-particularly as I wished to leave something from home. Only think of my anxiety to get a letter or some newspaper or other "intelligence" from there, after an absence of 2 months during which time I have heard but once, thro[ugh] yrs of 8th Febr'y ! I wonder what has become of all the letters written to me, to Augustine, Orange Springs, Tampa, etc. Is it not enough to weary the patience of Job arid extort bitter imprecations on the postmasters and post riders of this benighted land, to think that by their carelessness or corruption I am isolated for months. from the dearest objects of my life! Surely this is a terra *incognita* an *ultima thule* that no letters or newspapers from my home can reach it. I feel now, as I did when I slept in the road between Lake Monroe and Tampa,-that "I lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless continuity of shade," which Thompson fancied and desired-that I enjoy a solitude that Zimmerman might have envied. Yet, even in the midst of the strange faces by wh[ic]h I am surrounded, I feel like a solitary man, for I am uncheered by a single voice or face I love, or even by the slightest intelligence from the home of my heart. I can fully appreciate the misery of a solitary [. . .?]& shall oppose the system of solitary confinement hereafter as inquisitional, barbarous and inhuman. But a truce to repining and querulous talk or I shall get -into a phrenzy [sic].—I am now as far North as I shall get, save at Quincy, till I leave this state. I shall go hence tomorrow morning to Madisonville,²¹

20. John C. McGehee, president of Florida secession Convention.

21. Madison.

Madison Co., thence to Tallahassee, in Leon Co., where I shall write home again. My course will be almost due west till I reach Mobile-at which point I hope I shall hear from you, if not at Tallahassee or Pensacola. If I receive no letter at either of those places, I shall hasten home as fast as possible, for I shall be persuaded that some calamity has visited the family, wh[ich] in ill-judged kindness is withheld from my knowledge. God grant that I may hear that all are well, when I arrive in Tallahassee. You can say to Mr. Levert that Dr. Dell paid me the bal. of his a/c to McDonnell & Levert,—\$13.10—on presentment.—As I have nothing that will tickle my wife better, I will copy one of Col. P[earson]'s letters introductory:

“My dear Sir: Allow me to present to y[ou]r acquaintance my friend Judge C. C. Clay, Jr. of Ala.—a son of Ex Gov. C[lay], whose professional & political career has added a public reputation to the social rank w[hich] he enjoys.—He has sought our mild climate in search of health & is now on his way homeward. He is a gentleman every way entitled to your entire consideration & esteem—who you will be pleased to meet & . . . to part with. I need scarce commend my friend to the attentions of one whose hospitalities are even more widely known than his house. Very truly yrs., B. M. Pearson.”

J. C. McGehee, Esq., Madison Co., Fla.

Well said, if not appropriately, is it not? I feel, indeed, that it is *multum in parvo*—I need not translate for a Latin scholar.—Then here is Mrs. P[earson]'s letter to her cousin, Mr. Vans Randall.

“Lindsey Hall, March 29th, 1851

My dear Vans: You cannot fail to be pleased with Judge Clement C. Clay—a friend of Col. P[earson]'s from Ala. & son of ex Gov. Clay, of yr. profession—whom I take pleasure in introducing to you. The search for health has bro't him here, & we have found much pleasure in his company & part with him

with regret. In commending him to yr. attention, be assured you will meet a gentleman of the most pleasing manners, & one who has won for himself by his talents & attainments, a marked position in society. -I shall be pleased at any civility shown him.—I regretted not meeting you at Greenville last summer & invite you & Julia to visit us on this high. hill. My kind regards to Julia & with a goodly share for yourself, my dear cousin, yr. attached relative.

E. Leget Pearson.”

Too flattering, of course, but it will please my wife to know that I am so highly appreciated by my new friends. -Capt. Casey was exceedingly attentive to me at Tampa, —for wh[ich] I am indebted to Mr. J. L. Locke (to whom Mr. Cruse introduced me)-who in his letter said,

“I have only made Judge C[lay]’s acquaintance to-day, yet I commend him to yr. attention as I am sure you will find him, as I have done, a very agreeable & intelligent gentleman. Amin Bey, whom I met at Constantinople, sups with me tonight, in company with his dragoman (that is interpreter., C. Jr.), Mr. Brown.—I know but one word of Turkish, & that is *chack*, wh[ich] means *much*. It is fortunate when one knows little of a language, that that little should mean *much*.”

Very facetious, is it not ?-My vanity [?] will sustain me no longer.-Owing to the wet weather for several days past I have [not] felt altogether as well as usual, till today, when it is clear.-My cough is very slight & does not trouble me at all.—I look as well as you ever saw me. My love to all & kisses for the dear little ones from yr. most ardent lover, and ever-devoted husband.
C. C. Clay, Jr.