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A TRIP TO FLORIDA, 1867
THREE LETTERS OF MARY R. BIRCHARD
edited by WATT P. MARCHMAN

Mary Roxana Birchard, ¹ daughter of Austin Birchard, ² of Fayetteville, now Newfane, Vermont, was a first cousin of Rutherford Birchard Hayes who on March 4, 1877 became the nineteenth President of the United States. When Mary Birchard visited Florida during February and March, 1867, her cousin Rutherford was a Representative from Cincinnati, Ohio, in the Fortieth Congress of the United States,

Traveling southward so soon after the close of the Civil War, Mary Birchard, as a Northerner, was not certain how she would be received. Expecting to find bitterness among the Southerners, she was courteously treated by all she encountered. But she brought bitterness with her, for she had suffered a severe personal loss because of the War. Her younger brother, Sardis, ³ the baby of the family, had become a soldier in 1863; had been taken prisoner; and had died in Andersonville Prison on August 20, 1864.

Mary Birchard was invited on the Florida trip by a friend, Mrs. Mary ("Mollie") Coles, with whom she was living as a companion at the time. She was then forty years of age. Mrs. Coles came south in search of better health, and she and Mary

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1. Mary Roxana Birchard (1827-1876) the eldest daughter of four children of Austin Birchard and Mary Adeline Putnam, did not marry. She often visited Ohio where her Uncle Sardis Birchard and her sister Charlotte lived. She died in the terrible Ashtabula, Ohio, train disaster, December 29, 1876, while returning home to Vermont. Her body was never recovered.
 2. Austin Birchard (1793-1879) was a brother of Sophia Birchard Hayes, President Hayes's mother. In 1846 he was elected state senator and in 1854 became treasurer of the Windham County Savings Bank, a post he held for twenty years.
 3. Sardis Birchard (1842-1864), enlisted in Co. L, 11th Vt. Regt., on June 27, 1863 and became first sergeant. He was taken prisoner on the Weldon railroad, June 23, 1864, and carried to Andersonville, Ga., where he died August 20, 1864, and was buried in grave number 6334.

Birchard were among the first, after the War, to herald an ever increasing source of income for Florida - the tourist trade.

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Mills House ⁴

Charleston S.C. Feb 13th 1867 ⁵

My Dear Father,

We arrived here yesterday P. M. after a very stormy passage on the Quaker City.⁶ We were put in charge of the Capt who gave us his room, the finest place on the boat. Our [place is] at his right hand at the table & ourselves the envied of all as we had attention of Capt West on all occasions. He is a staunch man & a jolly sailor, Mary Coles did not sit up a moment - was very sick. We started Saturday at 3. P. M & reach'd here Tuesday 3 P.M. Saturday night was terribly stormy. We ship'd two seas that went over the smoke pipe's of the steamer. I was really frightened & quite sick. The Capt came in & waited upon us like a nurse & we were so ill we didn't mind it. The table in our state room tipp'd over & the chairs came tumbling after. The dishes danced about in the pantry - the brimy ocean came oozing into our room - I thought we should go down. In the morn the Capt. came in & enquired how we were. I said we were almost wreck'd; he laugh'd at us & said we had been in no danger. I told him I had rather *see a ship* than *ship a sea*. We could of course eat nothing. We laid in bed most of time. Mollie's bed in the words of Goldsmith "Contriv'd a double debt to pay, A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day." The silver belonging to the boat was kept there in drawers

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4. Mills House was located on the southwest corner of Meeting and Green Streets, Charleston.
 5. This and the following letter to Austin Birchard are in the Austin Birchard Papers, The Hayes Memorial Library, Fremont, Ohio.
 6. The steamer *Quaker City* does not appear on any of the passenger lines for the run between New York and Charleston. It is probable that the U. S. steamer *Quaker City* purchased by the government on August 19, 1861, and used as part of the Atlantic Squadron for blockading the Confederacy, was the same boat.

& the waiter came in after it, but nothing disturb'd us, we were so sick. I got up after awhile & reeled about - went on deck. Monday night the Capt took me to see the phosphorus in the sea; it was very fine. The grand old waves with silver crests, & the sparkling glow light was so beautiful that I then, & there, forgave old Ocean for making me like Whittier - "a contributor to the Atlantic." Had I been well I should have enjoy'd the tempest if I had felt safe. Monday morning I was horrified to see a rainbow in the sky; the prospect seem'd gloomy, but we had nothing as fearful as the tempest of Sat. night.

Arriv'd here; Capt W took us to this fine Hotel, into a fine room where we remain till Friday, then take boat for Florida, stop at Fernandina over night & then go down to Enterprise where we shall remain awhile. Capt. took us today out into this col[l]apsed, dilapidated town. Fire has swept thro' the business part leaving blacken'd ruin. Marks of shell are visible on many of the houses. I mean to go to the Stockade tomorrow & see where Amherst ⁷ spent so many wretched hours.

The Chamber of Commerce was here tonight for the first time since the war. The dining room is quite near us & we hear them gabble. Capt. is an invited guest. There is about 80 beside the guests.

Later - I've been eaves dropping & have heard the Carolinians make three after dinner speeches. Gov. Orr ⁸ talk'd very well - was willing S. C. should be fill'd with enterprising people even if they came from the North. There was some difference of opinion among them but they have got thro' without a fight & are passing by our door & expressing themselves in as audible a manner as can be expected considering the

7. Amherst Morse, of Co. E, 11th Vt. Regt. He was captured on the Weldon railroad, June 23, 1864, with Sardis Birchard, and was imprisoned at various places, including Charleston.

8. James Lawrence Orr (1822-1873), was the forty-fourth governor, 1866-1868, of South Carolina, and after the war was appointed by President Grant minister to Russia.

liquor they have taken. It is half past eleven & we shall go to bed now after our first day in Charleston. I'll finish tomorrow.

Have sent you a paper today with our arrivals in.

Good night.

[MARY BICHARD]

I'll send you the paper with the proceedings of the last night meeting. I enjoy'd the way some of the old traitors squirm'd over the Gov.'s speech. It was quite amusing to me. I've no time to enlarge further on the affair.

[Austin Bichard

Fayetteville, Vt.]

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Brock House,⁹ & the only one.

Enterprise Fla Feb 17th [1867].

My Dear Father,

We arr'd here last night after the most delightful sail from Palatka to this place up the St. Johns. It was a scene of enchantment, a perfect July day. Sometimes our channel was so narrow our boat would almost touch both shores & then so wide we could not see land on one side - the grand old oaks draped in its long graceful grey moss, standing like old druids with long grey locks. The bright sunlight, the singing birds & the rippled river, added to the delightful motion of our boat, left only the wish that our dear friends c'd enjoy it with us. An occasional shot from our boat announced to the Southern denizens (alligators) of the fair river that they had better keep down & not open their wide jaws to Northerners in such a rebellious manner. They got tired of it & like the S[outhern] C[onfederac]y, went under.

9. For another description of the Brock House, about a year later, see Ledyard Bill, *A Winter in Florida . . .* (New York, 1870), pp. 125-126. The Library of the Florida Historical Society has the registers of the Brock House for the years 1875-1911.

This morning I sit opposite Young¹⁰ the Tribune correspondent. Judge Hackett of N. Y. is here. Quite a place this is for invalids. Mollie & I have been to the bowling alley this morn with Miss Polk who came in the boat with us, & a Mr Gilchrist & two nieces. They are from Jacksonville - know intimately the lady Mrs. Bozeman wish'd to introduce to me. They are delightful people & very kind every one is to us. We shall stop here awhile; the house is on a lovely lake, an orange grove - one side with oranges on it, & pines on the other. A darkies encampment near, that looks very gipsy like. I cannot realize as I walk about in this summer sun that you are ice bound. I must say I like this best. This house is quite primitive, no carpets curtains nor luxuries, but when out doors is so charming you can wink at the discomforts inside. We shall walk & sail & chat & I think enjoy this novel out of the world spot very much. I feel as tho' I was out of America on foreign land & dont all the time feel like myself but wonder if it isn't somebody else.

Sometimes in the height of my enjoyment of this weird, wild, luxuriant nature, a terrible sadness thrills me, & I feel like shutting it all out & giving up to my sorrow, but I know I must not. I Heard two of the [men] talking on the boat. I wanted to pitch them overboard to their kindred alligators. One said it w'ld have been better for the South had Davis been hung ten y'rs ago.

We were invited to an excursion today to lake Harney but had been so long on the water concluded to try terra firma for today. - In their talk here it is "before the war" this & that-

We have a large room overlooking the lake - Miss Polk on one side - her brother on the other side of us. One of our

10. John Russell Young (1840-1899), journalist, was managing editor of the New York *Tribune* at the time. President McKinley appointed him Librarian of Congress in 1897. See John Russell Young, *Men and Memories* (New York, 1901).

passengers shot a wild Turkey & the boat went ashore & got it. I shall never forget that charming sail, but it is a long way from civilization. Capt Brock ¹¹ was an old blockade runner. We dont hear as yet any insidious remarks about Yankee's. I shall try & not get into any disputes. We will try & enjoy what is agreeable & shun the opposite. We get our mail but once pr week; the boat goes out to-night. Send this to Lottie ¹² & I will not write her this mail, n'xt week will write her. Direct my letters to Savannah Ga Care of Wm M Tunno & Co. They are the Bankers who supply us. It has cost Mollie more than \$100 to get here, but I think it will benefit her. Love to all.

Affec yr daughter

MARY

[Austin Birchard

Fayetteville, Vt.]

Brock house (the only one)

Enterprise Fla. Mar 9th 1867. ¹³

[Sardis Birchard ¹⁴

Fremont, Ohio.]

My Dear Uncle,

For many weeks I have been intending to write you. . . . I wish Uncle Sardis you were down here in this sunny land. I think it w'd do you good. My windows overlook a lovely lake & beautiful Orange grove. The rich perfume of those

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11. Mary Birchard may not have known it, but Captain Jacob Brock was also a native Vermonter. He had begun, in the 1850's, to build an inland enterprise on the St. Johns River *to encourage* visits of tourists and sportsmen. He operated several boats and built the inn which he called the Brock House. See Branch Cabell and A. J. Hanna, *The St. Johns . . .* (New York, 1943), pp. 266-268.
 12. "Lottie" was Mary Birchard's sister, Charlotte Putnam Birchard.
 13. This letter, incomplete, is in the Sardis Birchard Papers, The Hayes Memorial Library, Fremont, Ohio.
 14. Sardis Birchard (1800-1874), bachelor uncle of Mary Birchard, was a pioneer settler of Fremont, Ohio; a prominent merchant and banker. He became the legal guardian of his nephew, Rutherford B. Hayes, and willed the future president all of his property, including beautiful "Spiegle Grove" when he died.

starry blossoms, comes to me on the sweet sunsh. wind; & beautiful birds, gay butterflies & sunny skies, make you forget that it is winter anywhere, but only "glorious summer." We, Mrs Coles & myself have been here three weeks & two days; have had uninterrupted warm sunshine, thermometer ranging from 76 to 86.

I will give you a description of *Enterprise*. The name is suggestive. It is the Shire [county-seat] of Volusia Co.; the termination of navigation. It is on Lake Monroe. As you reach the shore from the Steamer on y'r left is the orange grove, with both fruit & flowers on the trees. On the right is a large hotel call'd the Brock house. This is fill'd with invalids mostly, consumptives who find this climate unrivaled for pulmonary disease, dry & hot, [and they] can live out of doors - but I digress; in the rear of this house a building dignified by the name of store stands; near that a bowling alley & work shop combined; a barny looking thing call'd a court house; and a blacksmith's shop, besides a log hut, comprise *Enterprise*. Permanent biped inhabitants 7 but it is densely inhabited by alligators, snakes, fleas, mosquitoes, lizards &c &c.

March 14th. I was a little under the weather for a few days & my letter c'ld not go by the boat, but must wait another week. Had a letter from Father saying all were well, so I am contented. Some Akron people came last boat. They know the Austins. We intend to leave here next Boat for Hibernia Fla. It is getting too warm here.

There isn't a waggon in this place; a few mules & horses roam about. These people date their privations since the War, but facts are stubborn things & the face of the country tells the story of laziness & as Miss Ophelia says "*shiftlessness*." The black stewardess told a lady on the boat, *Enterprise* was an old Indian name, she didn't know what it meant. The blacks are

lazy & independent; it will take a long time to raise them to a state of moral agency.

There isn't a garden in this enterprising town. We might, with just an iota of industry, be now enjoying green peas, strawberries, & tomatoes & all new vegetables but everything we eat is bro't in the boat, even condensed milk, tho' we have at this hotel a *V[ermont]t* cow but such a forlorn homesick looking traveller you never saw. She means & looks with supreme contempt on everything around after refusing to eat. She cost \$160; poor thing she looks as tho' she w'd give her powder horns for a nibble from her native hills.

A Curse seems to rest upon this sunny land; nothing but Yankee enterprise will ever develop its resources.

[At] *Old Enterprise*, a mile from here, there are relics of an old sugar mill, but no evidence of a local habitation & the *name* is a burlesque!! There is an Indian Mound there constructed of shells, & some sulphur springs, & lovely orange groves, tall palm trees & sweet flowers, all too beautiful to "waste their sweetness" on rattle snakes, alligators & rebels.

We have just had a shower, the first since we came. The orange grove looks as tho' every leaf was varnish'd; birds are singing, insects humming & the *sky* & land & lake seem more lovely than before.

Our trip from Savannah here up the St. Johns river was enchanting. Often our little boat was so near the shore we could grasp the leaves of the trees, then we w'd suddenly shoot out from the gracefully curved stream into a lake all glittery with diamonds of the finest water. Sometimes we would halt at a *place* with a *name* & a log house, a few rough looking bipeds both wh'te & bl'k who look'd as tho' they had been thro' the wars - The amusement [on the boat] was killing alligators. They shot at 100, did not kill them all, but they the alligators thinking

“discretion the better part of valor”, like the Southern confederacy, *went under* with considerable dispatch & found their last *ditch*. The north was too strong for them even on their own grounds.

I will take another sheet to finish. I should like very much to hear directly from you, to know how you are this season. I almost wrote summer. I was quite disappointed not going to Washington en route here. [We] shall go [home] by land; we came by sea.

I Design visiting my dear Brother Sardis' grave before I come home. I do not feel willing to return home till I have been where his precious young life was crush'd out. I may not find the exact place where he lies, but the spot mark'd for him I will try & believe is it, & plant some flower or tree over the grave. It is pretty hard to control my feelings sometimes as I walk about in this sunny land & think what he suffer'd. I Drive it from my mind, as I know I must keep cheerful on Mrs Coles' account.

She pays all my expenses for my company We find Northern people every where which makes it very pleasant. N. Y. & Boston have been well represented here. We had plenty letters of introduction & have been very fortunate thus far. We came all the way by water. From N Y to Charleston we were out in a terrible storm & were very sick, but Capt West who had us in charge done everything in his power for us. He put us in care of the Capt of the Dictator,¹⁵ & so we were transfer'd from that to the “Darlington”.¹⁶ We had no trouble with our baggage & very little anoyance of any kind. Met a great many Northern people travelling in quest of health.

We return by rail from Charleston, spend a week in Aiken

15. The *Dictator* and the *City Point* were steamers which operated out of Charleston for Savannah, Femandina and Jacksonville every Tuesday and Saturday. (*Jowitt's Charleston City Directory, and Business Register, 1869-70*, p. 260.)

16. The *Darlington* was one of Captain Jacob Brock's boats which operated on the St. Johns River between Jacksonville and Enterprise.

S.C. then to Richmond & Washington. Shall not get to N Y before the middle of May. I feel very anxious about Lottie's health. She has cough and pain her chest. I wish she was here instead of me. It would do her good I know. Another winter if she isn't better she must go South.

I learned that martial law is proclaim'd thro' the late rebellious states. We expect soldiers here next week to camp near us. Why dont they put Andy Johnson under martial law? I dont hear much since here; there is but one Southern lady in the house, & she is a poor widow with two young children, who has quite chang'd her opinion of Yankee's since she has been here. We haven't yet come in contact with the rabid kind who dare talk.

I've been to the *court house*¹⁷ this morning; no latch on the door, no whole glass in the window, & I assure you nothing courtly or elegant in its architecture. I Dont think a louder laugh ever echo'd thro' those halls of justice, even at the wit of the Salon's who occupied those rough benches, than I gave at the sight of this enterprising public building. Well, what has made these people to differ? The answer is obvious - Slavery. How miserably blind they have been to their own interest to submit such a degraded existence. They are as great sufferers as the blacks have been. I think they begin to see it, but are so mad, that good should come to them thro' the *hated Yankee's* that they wont admit it. I think now they hang their hopes on "*My Policy*" [President Johnson] and expect he will bring them back like conquering hero's instead of subdued reb's.

March 16. Today we have a fire in our room. It is raining, not very cold, but damp & a fire very acceptable. Two days more & the boat (the link that connects us with the world) will be here with letters. We think of leaving here then for Hibernia about 160 miles north of here.

17. Enterprize, besides being a resort, was the county seat of Volusia County (See Sidney Lanier, *Florida, its Scenery, Climate and History* . . . Philadelphia, 1876, p. 318).

I Fear the quality of this letter will not make amends for the quantity, but when I get where I can see more of this country & people, my letters may be more interesting.

Remember me kindly to my Fremont friends. Where is Sarah Grant?¹⁸

I Hope this letter will find you in good health. Remember me to Lucy & Rutherford¹⁹ when you write them; tell them I was very sorry not to go to W[ashingto]n while they were there. Good bye.

Affec y'r niece

MARY R. BIRCHARD.

18. Sarah Jane Grant was a daughter of George and Statira Dickinson Grant, early settlers of Fremont.

19. Rutherford B. and Lucy Webb Hayes.