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EARLY LETTERS FROM R. K. CALL

by WILLIE D. HALSELL

RICHARD KEITH CALL and Edward Brett Randolph were both born in Virginia, only a few months apart. Since they were distantly related, they may have known each other before their participation in the Indian wars in the southeast and Florida. By 1819, they had made exceptional reputations for loyalty and bravery, Randolph at Fort Erie and Chippaway, both in the Indian campaigns.¹

The two letters by Call that are printed below² were penned by him while he was on Andrew Jackson's staff and Randolph, recently resigned from the 4th Infantry, was sutler for that regiment.

How often these two met in later years is not known. Randolph married Elizabeth Bland Beverley in 1825, moved to Columbus, Mississippi, where he owned a plantation and, from 1843 to his death in 1848, held the office of Receiver of Public Moneys for District Lands. Sometime before 1835, he freed his slaves and sent them to Liberia.

Call, as is well known to Floridians, achieved fame through a distinguished career as envoy to the Spaniards, as railroad and town builder, and as governor of the state.

The originals of the letters here printed are in poor physical condition, age having stained and crumbled the edges of the fragile pages. Little of the real matter has been lost, however, and the result is that we gain a glimpse of Call's interests and friends while he was still in his twenties. His confidence in the future of Florida may also be seen.

1. The typed "Autobiography" of Edward Brett Randolph is in the Randolph-Sherman Manuscripts of which microfilm copies have been made at Mississippi State University. Originals are in possession of a descendant, Mrs. T. Bailey Hardy, Columbus, Mississippi. ** James Alexander Robertson, "Richard Keith Call," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: 1934), II, 422-423; Caroline Mays Brevard, "Richard Keith Call," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, I (1908), 3-12.

2. Randolph-Sherman MSS.

Nashville 2nd May 1819

My Dear Randolph

A few days since I had the pleasure of receiving your letter of the 21st April than which nothing could have afforded me greater satisfaction.

I regret very much in my passage through Virginia that I had not time to visit our Relations, but the General had set out so many days previous to my departure from the City that I was compelled to ride like a Post Boy in order to Save my distance. From Washington I [went] to Richmond, via, Baltimore Norfolk and []burgh, a direct Rout that, but I had [heard] of the intended selebration [sic] of St. Patrick [Day] by the Hibernian association in Baltimore. I took that Rout alone with a view of p[articipation] in the amusement of that festival, and I assure you I never was more highly gratified in my life than on that occasion, it was attended by all the respectable Irish Gentlemen of the City and the most perfect decorum prevailed during the ceremony.

Since our return the General has laboured under the most severe indisposition, he was so seriously afflicted; for ten or twelve days we had but little hopes of his recovery. However the diseas[e] has been ultimately removed and his health is now almost entirely restored.

We have yet heard [sic] nothing from the Spanish Cabinet, in Relation to the cession of the Floridaies [sic]. There are some fears apprehended least [sic] the Treaty should not be ratified, but for my own part I cannot entertain a doubt on the subject. Spain is too sensible of our Strength, and her weakness [] hazzard, a contest in which she would have everything to loss [sic] and nothing to gain, when every political [misun]-derstanding between the two Government[s] may be honourably and amicably adjusted by [] compliance on the part of Spain, with the articles specified in the last treaty. I flatter myself that the 4th of July will find the American [Flag] waving over the walls of the Barrancas.

I regret extremely to hear of the difficulties which exist in the 4th. I have a high opinion of Hogan,³ and though Billy King⁴

3. Major John B. Hogan, Paymaster, 4th Regiment U. S. Infantry.

4. Colonel William King, 4th Regiment U. S. Infantry.

did not agree on the subject of catching Negroes and dividing Prize money, still I have a high Respect for him as a Soldier. I presume they are both [hard?] Characters in making out charges and specifications.⁵

Tel[l] Neilson,⁶ to whom I beg you to [] me most affectionately that I have waited with anxious expectation for an answer to the letter which I addressed [] December last but that my pa[tience is] all most exhausted.

. . . [A short paragraph here is so faded and frayed that the sense is not clear.]

Present me Respectfully to [] Neilson and the rest of my friends [,] for your self accept the assurance [sic] of my Sincere regard

Your friend
R. K. Call

E. B. Randolph

P. S. I shall expect to hear from you very soon

[Addressed on back to] Capt. E. B. Randolph

Tensaw

Alabama

Hermitage 9 Dec. 1819

My Dear Randolph

Your letter of the 6th of Oct I had the pleasure of receiving by due corce [sic] of Mail and I should have given it an immediate answer but, being much engaged at the time it arrived, it was laid aside until a leasure [sic] moment would enable me to attend to it, and in that situation it remained unanswered and forgotten until chance directed it to my view to day.

You mention the death of your [] I sympathise with you most sincerely in your misfortunes, but if he was doomed to lead a life of insanity, his death should not be regret[t]ed, he has escaped the greatest [t] curse which can befall man in this life. He has gone to an other and I hope a better world.

5. He refers to activities later aired in the court martial trial of Colonel William King in which Hogan preferred charges. *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, II, 139-188.

6. Randolph and Neilson or Nelson were sutlers for the 4th Infantry under the firm name of Nelson & Randolph. Randolph's "Autobiography" gives William Walker as Neilson's first name, though some letters in the Randolph correspondence are signed Robert Neilson.

In your last you spoke of disposing of your property in Pensacola. I would advise you by all means [sic] to retain possession of it, as its value must be greatly increased by an annexation of the Floridas to the Territory of the U. States, and of this there is little doubt. It is generally believed that if the negotiation [sic] so long pending between the U. States and Spain should prove unsuccessful, that the Floridaies [sic] will be forcably [sic] occupied by our Troops during the Winter, in either case the Spanish Provincial Govenment [sic] will be abolished, and the laws of the U. States introduced, this will give encouragement to emmigration [sic], and hence an increased value to the land in that Country as well as every other pieces [sic] of property.

We have nothing new among us, we are waiting with much impatience to see what course Congress will pursue in relation to our affairs with Spain.

On leaving Pensacola I left two trunks I believe in charge of Lieut Houston.⁷ Will you be pleased to make enquiry for them and inform me of their destiny in your next. excuse this letter. I am ashamed of it but I have time to say no more.

Yours Affectionately
R. H. Call

E. B. Randolph Esq
[Addressed on outside to] Capt. E. B. Randolph
Fort Montgomery
Alabama

7. Probably Lt. A. M. Houston, 7th Infantry. His name is mentioned in the King trial.