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A LETTER FROM OCCUPIED TALLAHASSEE

edited by BERTRAM H. GROENE *

BRIGADIER GENERAL EDWARD M. MCCOOK, a thirty-two year old Union cavalry officer, accompanied by five staff officers, and units from the Second Indiana Cavalry and Seventh Kentucky Cavalry, numbering about 500 men, left Macon, Georgia, on May 5, 1865. He was under orders to accept the surrender of Confederate forces at Tallahassee and St. Marks. Leaving his cavalry four miles behind on the Thomasville Road, McCook and his officers quietly rode into Tallahassee and there on May 10 they received the surrender by Major General Samuel Jones of Florida's Confederate forces.¹ Two days later McCook received the surrender of the fort at St. Marks. In a special ceremony on May 20, the Union flag was raised over the state capitol with Acting Governor Abraham Allison, Florida officials, and a crowd of Tallahassee citizens quietly witnessing the sad event.² The long and bloody war was over for the people of Florida and the military occupation of their state had begun.

Anticipating the collapse of Florida's Confederate government, Hugh Archer, attorney general, had collected the battle flags and turned them over to his brother James' wife, Mary Brown Archer, to hide from the Union soldiers. Mary, and her young sister Margaret, ripped off the ceiling in a room in their home and secreted the banners "in between the wall."³ Ardent and loyal to their lost cause, neither Mary Archer nor her sister revealed their secret, and the flags were not retrieved until 1878.

* Mr. Greene is assistant professor of history at Southeastern Louisiana College.

1. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963), 208-09; William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), 326-27; Ellen Call Long, *Florida Breezes; or, Florida, New and Old* (Jacksonville, 1883), 380-81; Albert H. Roberts, "Tallahassee Rejoins the Union," *Apalachee* (1944), 74-80.
2. Roberts, "Tallahassee Rejoins the Union," 77.
3. Daisy Parker, "Battle Flags of Florida Troops in Confederate Service," *Apalachee* (1948-1950), 6. It is Brown family tradition which includes Margaret in the flag hiding.

It was with this spirit of rebellion very much alive in her that forty-four year old Mary Brown Archer wrote a four-page letter in November 1865 from Tallahassee to her maiden cousin, Mag (Margaret) Brown, in Charles Town, West Virginia. In it she tells of the reversed conditions of her once politically influential and affluent family. Her father, former Governor Thomas Brown, had brought Mary, her mother, and five other children from Virginia to Florida in 1828. Using the political experience that he had acquired as a Virginia legislator, Brown rose rapidly to political power in the Florida territory. He became in succession territorial auditor (1834) president of the territorial legislative council (1838), a leader at the Constitutional Convention held in St. Joseph in 1838, a member of the Legislative Council from Leon County, secretary of the territorial senate (1844), and member of Florida's first state legislature in 1845. In the great Whig landslide in 1848 which moved Zachary Taylor into the White House, Brown became governor of Florida. He was also a cotton and sugar cane planter and operated The Planter Hotel and later the City Hotel in Tallahassee. The close of the Civil War found the governor sick and nearly penniless. He lived out the remaining months of his life under the care of Mary and her sister, Margaret, at Bel Air, a formerly exclusive resort south of Tallahassee, and died in Tallahassee on August 24, 1867.⁵

The original of Mary's letter is in the possession of Mrs. William S. Manning of Jacksonville, Florida, a great granddaughter of Governor Brown. She supplied the information identifying the various persons in the letter. The spelling, grammar, and punctuation is as it was in the original.

Belair

Nov. 19th, 1865

Dear Mag,

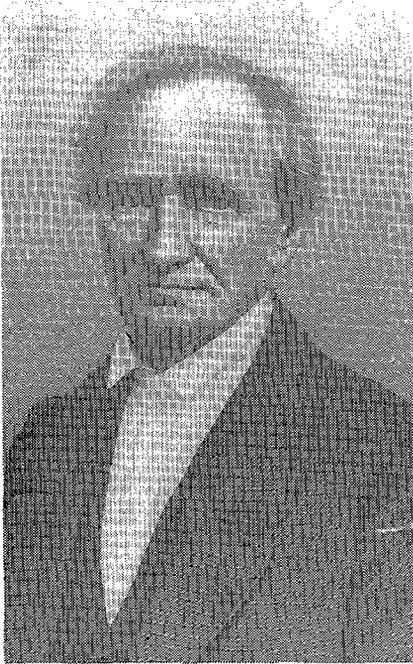
Your letter was handed me a day or two since, when I was just recovering from an attack of fever from cold caught. . . . I

4. Clifton Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail: An Agricultural Chronicle of Leon County, Florida, 1860-1967* (Gainesville, 1968), 4; Mary D. Lewis, "Thomas Brown," *Apalachee* (1944), 90-95.
5. Bel Air was an exclusive summer resort three miles south of Tallahassee. It was built in late 1841. Bertram H. Groene, "Ante-Bellum Tallahassee" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1967), 103-04.

believe I have answered all of your letters that I received but one. That one, I should have answered long ago, but *many* things prevented me, and therefore I ask your forgiveness for seeming neglect. In Polly's letter to your mother she spoke of Tom Denham's sickness.⁶ Poor fellow! he died soon after. 'Tis sad to see Jinnie and her four little ones. All in delicate health Poor Tom, like the rest of the Confederates lost by the war, and therefore, has left his family *very poor*. Jinnie and her family will live with Polly for the present, perhaps altogether. We are all poor, and will try to help each other. If it had not been for Jinnie's (former) servants, I don't know how she could have stood her afflictions. They knew she had nothing to pay them with yet they staid with her all but two, one had been hired out. He now acts more like a *brother*, than a servant. He gives her advice, buys with his own money things *he thinks* she needs and says she shall never suffer if he can help it. The other one that left went away to regain his health. When he returned he came, offered his services to her to do anything in his power. Her two nurses, altho they know Jinnie has no money, (or very little) say they will go with her wherever she goes. When Jinnie gave them some money they slip'd it back in her draw and said, "Does Miss Jinnie think we are going take her money from her?" And now they are saving money that they may be able to give her children Christmas presents. I have told you this particularly for I do not think such acts of devotion should go un-noticed. I feel that I could not do too much for them. And every night Sue and myself spend two hours or more teaching them and six others to read, write and etc.⁷ If we charged we could get a big school, but, as yet, I don't care about placing myself upon the level of these "Yankee school Marm's" who teach darkies. In the morning I teach Sue and Jinnie's children Music and other lessons - This is truly the *dark age*, for the darkys have everything, do as they please, and can get what they please. Well, I suppose "it is so decreed," and we must wait patiently. Our Provisional Govn thinks, from the course our Convention took, that our State will be admitted and even

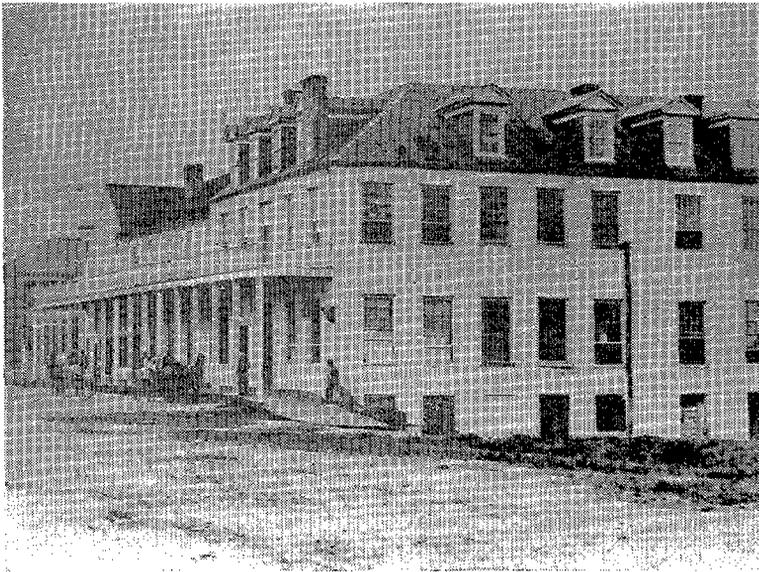
6. Confederate soldier Thomas Pringle Denham was the husband of Governor Brown's third daughter, forty-one year old Virginia Lafayette, or Jinnie, as she was known. Polly is unidentifiable.

7. Sue was Susan Matilda Archer, Mary Brown Archer's daughter.



Governor Thomas Brown
(1785-1867)

The City Hotel which Governor Brown owned in Tallahassee. It burned in 1886.



if Congress don't admit our representatives, the President will admit the State and allow a Civil Government, and then we will be free from Military rule.⁸ Some of the officers are doing all in their power to be just to us, but there are others who have the rule that act just the opposite way. One Genl. Newton, a renegade Virginian who commands this district, is a negro lover, that is he does everything for them and against the whites and omits no chance to insult our citizens by his conduct.⁹ Genl. Foster is kinder but as he commands the whole of Fla. he cannot interfere too much in Newton's district.¹⁰ We suppose Newton does this way and takes pleasure in it because the people of Middle Florida gave him such a disgraceful whipping at the "Battle of Natural Bridge," when about four hundred men and boys whiped and made to run, some two thousand "U. S. Troops." -Truly generous conduct to a fallen foe!¹¹ There are, of course, a great many "U. S. officers" in town, and many of them have their familys. I hear they complain of the cold treatment they receive from the citizens. That but few of them are invited out, or are visited by the people of T. I am proud to hear it, and see that at least some have a little spirit left. But it makes [me] mad to see how our ladies run after the fashions of this *vulgar age*. I did hope the Ladies of the South would show that they were Confederates by the distinction of dress, but gracious me! Some are trying to get their clothes as high above their knees as the Yankee ladies, and it is no uncommon thing now to see them walk the streets with their dresses tucked up as if they were going to wash or scour. What an age! What a fashion!!

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8. Provisional Governor William Marvin was appointed by President Andrew Johnson in July 1865. Kevin E. Kearney (ed.), "Autobiography of William Marvin," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXVI (January 1958), 215-16.
 9. Brigadier General John Newton, Union commander of the District of Key West and Tortugas, directed the offensive against St. Marks in March 1865. For biographical data see Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1903), I, 746.
 10. Major General John Gray Foster, a West Point graduate, was military commander of the Department of Florida at the time of this letter. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 357, 386.
 11. There were approximately 600-700 Confederate troops and about 500 Union soldiers (Second and Ninety-ninth U. S. Colored Infantry) at the Battle of Natural Bridge, March 6, 1865. Mark F. Boyd, "The Joint Operations of the Federal Army and Navy Near St. Marks, Florida, March 1865," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (October 1950), 111-12.

Maybe it is an easy way to make us get use to tucking up our clothes to do our washing and scouring-as many of us will have to come to it. The Judge speaks of taking his family to Va. in Jany. It may be talk.¹² I don't think he knows what he is going to do. Some want him to run for the U. S. Senate. I dont think there is much chance of that. Govn Marvin will be one of the Candidates.¹³ Our State elections will come off this week, and all Confederate soldiers or officers who run will be elected.¹⁴ But unfortunately there are too many running for the same office.

Papa has not been well lately. He had quite a serious attack not long since and I don't think he has entirely gotten over it. He is looking forward to Spring, hoping that something will "turn up" that will enable us all to go on to Va. once more. But alas! It is "hoping against hope." He has *not a cent*. . . . My health is beginning to be "puny" and I "look the old maid to perfection" - I must stop a minute. Gov. Marvin has called, the old Yankee!!! He has gone. He is a good man, good Episcopalian, almost as good as Cousin Robert only he is Yankee born, but has lived South 30 years. Yet Yankee sticks out. But as he is trying to do all he can for the good of us Floridians, I s-u-p-p-o-s-e I ought to "bear all things, believe all things, hope all things endure all things." "For now we see through a glass darkly." I ought not to "behave" myself "unseemly" nor be "easily provoked" and "think no evil" but it will take a better Christian than I am to be so very charitable. There is a good deal of the "Old Adam" in me yet. But I am not alone. There are many who during this war thought the "effectual fervant prayer of the righteous would avail" and after so many millions of fervant prayers offered by so many truly pious people, and all to fail, Ah! It has shaken the faith of many, yet I hope my faith is not shaken for

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12. Samuel J. Douglass, a former Florida Territorial and later Confederate judge, was the husband of Francis Elizabeth Brown Douglass, the governor's oldest daughter. Kearney (ed.), "Autobiography of William Marvin," 215.
 13. The General Assembly convened on December 18, 1865, and ex-Governor Marvin was elected to the U. S. Senate, December 29, 1865. Thaddeus Stevens blocked the acceptance of his credentials and Marvin never took his seat. *Ibid.*, 215, 218-19; *Florida Senate Journal, 1865*, 87; John Wallace, *Carpetbag Rule in Florida* (Jacksonville, 1888), 17.
 14. For the most part Confederates were elected at this time. Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 365-66; Kearney, ed. "Autobiography of William Marvin," 215-17.

I know "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth" and in this instance, I hope it is he loves us more than he does the Yankees. . . . I had given up in a measure visiting everyone but old friends (and those but seldom) and devoted my time to Polly and Papa. All join in love to all our relations. I could write another sheet but will have mercy upon you. . . . Goodbye.

Yours affectionately

Mary

I forgot to tell you. Not long since Polly was in town when her carriage was ordered from before the store door by one of the negro soldiers. Bishop Rutledge was talking to her at the time and went over and told her helpless state.¹⁶ He (the negro) again said she must go away from there or go to jail. When it was reported to the Captain he said there was no such order and put the negro in stocks for 12 hours.

15. Francis Huger Rutledge was the Episcopal bishop of Florida from 1851 to 1866. He was an ardent secessionist. Joseph D. Cushman, Jr., *A Goodly Heritage: The Episcopal Church in Florida, 1821-1892* (Gainesville, 1965), 27, 42-43, 76; Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 183.