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Recommended Citation

Clark, Patricia (1969) "A Tale To Tell From Paradise Itself", George Bancroft's Letters from Florida, March 1855," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 48 : No. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol48/iss3/4>

“A TALE TO TELL FROM PARADISE ITSELF”

George Bancroft's Letters from Florida,
March 1855

Edited by PATRICIA CLARK*

ALTHOUGH THE DEVELOPMENT of Florida as a resort for wealthy northern vacationers saw a product of the post-Civil War era, the decade preceding the war was the beginning of a modest influx of travelers, particularly to the northeast region which bordered on the St. Johns River and its tributaries. The subtropical climate, which proved to have a beneficial effect on those suffering mainly with chronic respiratory and bronchial ailments, lured the invalid, while the variety of bird and animal life attracted the hunters. In addition, there were the inveterate travelers—those disposed to adventure or goaded by curiosity as to customs and mores—who came and were usually captivated.

But the tourist of the 1850s confronted certain hazards, not the least of which were wretched traveling conditions. There were no railroad connections out of Florida, so that those who ventured southward usually did so by steamer, a semi-weekly packet which carried both passengers and mail, from Savannah and Charleston to Jacksonville, Palatka, and other points along the rivers. As a consequence, exposure to stormy seas, often accompanied by seasickness, or, as sometimes happened, temporary immobilization when the ship ran aground, were an accepted part of any voyage. Nor was overland by coach any better. Passengers electing this method of transportation faced a rough journey over sandy roads punctuated with pine and palmetto knots and roots, which pitched the occupants of the coach about in a most disagreeable manner. Yet, despite all these discomforts and the inadequacies of accommodations, the number of travelers attracted to Florida increased.¹

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1. Herbert J. Doherty, Jr., "Florida in 1856," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXV (July 1956), 60-70; Benjamin F. Rogers, "Florida Seen Through the Eyes of Nineteenth Century Travellers," *ibid.*, XXXIV (October 1955), 177-89; Olin Norwood, ed., "Letters from Florida in 1851," *ibid.*, XXIX (April 1951), 261-83.

In the spring of 1855, George Bancroft, the diplomat-historian, his latest manuscript completed ² and in the hands of his publishers, joined this growing list of distinguished Florida visitors. Curious and interested, a maker as well as a writer of history, Bancroft spent the greater part of several years during the fifties in travel. He had returned from England in 1849, where he had served the Polk administration as American minister and had settled in New York City to continue his work on his multi-volume history of the United States. ³ He gave occasional lectures and traveled as time and his inclination dictated. In the summer of 1854 he visited Chicago and went as far west as St. Louis. His southern trip in March and April 1855, was followed that fall by a return to Yorkville, South Carolina, for a celebration commemorating the Battle of King's Mountain. He repeated his western tours in June 1857, and in the summer of 1858, he went South again, stopping at the South Carolina Historical Society in Charleston and the University of Georgia in Athens. His biographers, observing that this decade was the quiet time of his life, were either unaware of or failed to mention the full extent of his travels, particularly his trip to Florida. ⁴

These letters written from Florida to his second wife, Elizabeth Davis Bliss, whom he married after the death of his first wife, Sarah Dwight Bancroft, are a part of the George Bancroft Papers in the Cornell University Collection of Regional History. ⁵ The correspondence is personal - family and friends are mentioned - as Bancroft shared his impressions with his wife, whose health and distaste for travel kept her home. There are only a few scattered letters from her in this part of the Cornell collection. Perhaps Bancroft's rapidity of movement was the

2. George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York, 1855).

3. George Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1834-1874).

4. Mark Anthony De Wolfe Howe, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 2 vols. (New York, 1908); Russel Blaine Nye, *George Bancroft: Brahmin Rebel* (New York, 1944).

5. The present editor is indebted to the Cornell University Library for the use of these letters, and especially to Herbert Finch, archivist and editor of the microfilm edition of the George Bancroft Papers. Dr. Finch and his staff kindly assisted in transcription and with helpful suggestions in editing.

cause, for he nearly always mentioned where he next expected to find her communications to him.

Sailing from New York in the afternoon of March 3, Bancroft arrived two days later in Savannah, Georgia, where he stayed at the Pulaski House. On March 8, "having made a compact with the Ocean, & fear him no more," he boarded a packet for Florida.⁶ Letters were dispatched from Palatka, Ocala, and Jacksonville. Mechanical failure delayed his return voyage, but he reached Charleston on March 31. From April 3 until April 9 he visited Columbia, South Carolina, thence to Guilford Courthouse, Raleigh, and Charlotte, North Carolina, arriving back in New York in mid-April.

Everywhere Bancroft traveled, he met acquaintances, many of whom remain unidentified in his correspondence. Often he was recognized or sought out. On one occasion, on his return through Charleston, a gentleman "stepped into the cars to offer me a trunk of papers of his grandfather's who was a great patriot of Pennsylvania."⁷ His reflections, mirrored in his correspondence, while brief, attest to his insatiable curiosity about the human experience. As his descriptions appear more factual than poetic, his comments on conditions are also more objective than judgmental. This is especially so when one considers his remarks on the "peculiar institution," in which he was keenly, if not passionately, interested. Despite the usual traveler's malaise, Bancroft was obviously enchanted with much of what he saw - "a large turtle sunning himself . . . alligators from infant size to those that to my unpracticed eye seemed twelve feet long . . . the yellow jessamine in full bloom. . . . I have seen nothing like it."

An anti-slavery Democrat, he observed that "Know nothingism has found its way here. . ." and that the antagonism toward the North was so "very strong and very bitter" that even "the north star crouches downward to the horizon, as if half afraid to tell the people of the South that there is a North." The people he found "remarkably temperate, cold water . . . the common beverage;" the slaves fared well "but this condition makes them stolid."

6. George Bancroft to Elizabeth Davis Bliss Bancroft, March 3, 1855, George Bancroft Papers, Cornell University Collection of Regional History.

7. Bancroft to Elizabeth Bancroft, April, 1855, *ibid.*

Unfortunately, some of his letters have been lost or mutilated, in some cases only fragments remain. The letters are reproduced here with a minimum of correction or emendation. Brackets have been used to clarify words, supply missing periods, or to warn the reader of the uncertainty or illegibility of transcription. The ellipses in the documents are Bancroft's, not the editors.

Florida. Pilatka, 10 March 1855. Dear wife, Today I find myself really in the sunny south; the air is soft and balmy, though the evening is cool as becomes the season. The *Darlington* which should have started on its trip up the river at 9 o'clock, delayed its departure, vainly awaiting the *Florida*; which we more fortunate people had left behind.⁸ At last we got under way, ascending up this wonderful river through the strange unparalleled country. The stream reminds me of the St. Lawrence river below Montreal, wide, deep, and majestic;⁹ but with banks but just lifted above its waters; and a back country every where so flat that it would seem as if the land were but just removed above the sea. I have asked many persons how high is the highest land in Florida I mean the Peninsula, and I can get no one to say more than 126 feet.¹⁰ And from such a dividing ridge flows this stream with waters fresh or brackish, always full; and supplied (except what it gets through the tides from the ocean,) by subterranean Springs. From all the accounts I get, this is the very land of Fountains. The St. Johns you know is the River May of the first French discoverers:

8. The *Darlington*, a 298-ton packet built in 1849 in Charleston, started its Florida runs from Palatka to Enterprise in 1853. Owned and operated by Jacob Brock, a Florida entrepreneur who built a tourist hotel at Enterprise, the *Darlington* could carry forty passengers in modest comfort. Used by Brock for Confederate service, both ship and skipper were captured and the steamer became a Federal yacht. The *Florida*, the second steam packet of this name on the St. Johns, was built in New York in 1851. She was used for direct service to Charleston. Her owner-skipper, Louis M. Coxetter, was one of the most famous of the early coastal skippers. During the Civil War, the *Florida* was used as a Confederate blockade-runner. Branch Cabell and A. J. Hanna, *The St. Johns: A Parade of Diversities* (New York, 1943), 238-39, 266-68; Edward A. Mueller, "East Coast Florida Steamboating, 1831-1861," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XL (October 1961), 254-56.

9. A similar comparison to the St. Lawrence was made by William Cullen Bryant after a trip down the St. Johns in 1843. Cabell and Hanna, *The St. Johns*, 198-99.

10. The highest point, 345 feet above sea level, is in Walton County.

and the murder of the Huguenots took place on its banks, just above the mouth of the river in an enchanting spot, which I passed yesterday. They call the spot now St. John's bluff, it being a sandy knoll, rising a few feet more than common above the water. I met on the wharf at Jacksonville this morning D^r Baldwin,¹¹ who has an historical turn; and in commemoration of *three* centuries which will have elapsed since the discovery of the river in 1562 he proposes a celebration in 1862. As to the river I must own its banks have great sereneness; but as we stopped at Flamingo island, I saw the deciduous trees putting out their beautiful foliage; the gum tree, the maple, and a tree with thick foliage which I did not know. The cypress tree is swelling; but not yet in full leaf. The water of the St. John's not being fit to drink, we steamed five miles up the Black River. This was to me the greatest novelty yet. Fruit trees in leaf, the dogwood a sheet of white, the oaks covered with thick beards of moss, hanging down lower than Aaron's beard; then often on a log by the side of the stream a large turtle sunning himself in solitude, or sometimes in company; and alligators from infant size to those that to my unpracticed eye seemed twelve feet long, & were said to have been so. The region is as quiet as in the days of Adam: no sign of the residence of man was to be seen; the dense woods came down to the water's edge; the yellow jessamine in full bloom almost hung on the water. I have seen nothing like it.

Arriving at Picolato¹² at noon, I encountered D^r Stevens who, in pure despair, had that morning resolved to ascend the St. Johns. I at once let him know, that it was predestined & fore ordained that he should do so in my company. He gave in, & with nurse & baby & charming daughter just from the Boarding School & wife, entered the Boat. At [] we made rather a long halt to take in freight. I went on shore into the thickest

11. Abel Seymour Baldwin (1811-1898), New York physician, founder and first president of the Florida Medical Association, came to Jacksonville in 1838 for his health. In addition to his practice, he also served in the state legislature and as president of the Florida Atlantic and Gulf Central Railroad. Webster Merritt, "Physicians and Medicine in Early Jacksonville," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (April 1946), 277-82; Webster Merritt, *A Century of Medicine in Jacksonville and Duval County* (Gainesville, 1949), 11-16.

12. Picolata was the debarking point for St. Augustine which was then reached by stage or horse over the remaining forty-eight miles.

clump of orange trees and from the bitter oranges shook ripe fruit, of which the quantity was infinite, saw the green fruit, and cut a heap of orange blossoms; not a sprig, but an armful of large boughs. The coming on of evening was beautiful, but the smoke from the prairie fires fill the air & make it hazy, so that the splendor of the sun was very much dimmed at its decline.

At Pilatka where we arrived after dark, I found Mr. & Mrs Strong and baby all famously well. Mr. Strong had been out shooting English snipe and duck.

In the evening a bright light attracted me; it seemed as if a large enclosure was illumined: but it was only a fire made of light wood in a slave's shanty. On going in we found the man and his wife sitting like models of conjugal. love before the bright flame; he a blacksmith, well educated, made to pay his boss twenty dollars a month; she a laundress, who is forced to earn seven dollars a month for her owner. The man was intelligent & could read. He sometimes exhorts, but complains that the "colored people," so he was careful to call them, are too much broken into sects. On the whole it was a very sad scene.

Love to Sandy. ¹³

Good wife I hope to find many letters at Savannah. To this one you may send your answer to Charleston.

G. B.

Mch. [16] 1855

Ocala, Friday 4 P. M.

I came over to this place, the county seat of Marion county in the heat of the day, which I must call the hottest day in March I ever encountered. I passed under a boiling sun through Caldwell's ¹⁴ large sugar & cotton plantation; but the cotton is not yet up; & the slips & the rattoons of the sugar cane have nothing very dazzling to the eye; & indeed I am told that the sugar cane when it is tallest, looks like a field of Indian Corn.

13. Sandy was Bancroft's stepson, Alexander Bliss. Mrs. Bancroft was a widow with two sons when she married Bancroft in 1838. Nye, *George Bancroft*, 120.

14. Caldwell was one of the wealthy plantation owners, most of whom were from Georgia and South Carolina. Eloise Robinson Ott, "Ocala Prior to 1868," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VI (October 1927), 94.

And so I came to this little town, a bantling of seven or eight years having they pretend about 500 inhabitants,¹⁵ a courthouse and a state Seminary.¹⁶ In the street is a tall oak, capped by mistletoe; in a garden opposite me, orange trees laden with the golden fruit, (sour, the sweet oranges disappeared months ago); in the lowland just off the small table on which the town stands is a hammock, that is, a thick duster of trees other than the pine. My landlord at Silver Spring drove me over to Ocala, and on the way made the usual defence of slavery; that there must be employer & employed; that the slave is better fed & clad, than poor white men; that a hired free person may be turned off when sick; that the feeble slave must be nursed by his master, both from interest and humanity. On the other hand it is admitted that slavery stands in the way of the white mechanic and laborer, and repels them. - Thus far I have seen no signs of cruelty or harshness. I see slaves faring well, singing & chattering; but this condition makes them stolid. When you receive this letter write to me at Columbia. Consider of the present you propose making in our joint behalf to Fanny - to whom if she is with you give my love. Of the great chest of tea, *send twenty pounds* as a present from me to *Lucretia*, & *twenty to Eliza*.¹⁷ You probably have a 40 pound tea chest; fill it & send it to one of them with directions to divide with the other. Love to Sandy

Your affectionate husband
George Bancroft

Ocala 17 March 55

I have said nothing of discomforts. Why should I tell you of the rubbish & slatternly smells & piles of dirt, ducks, pigs, little negroes & all things huddled together round the house

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15. Estimates of the town's population ran as high as 1,000 but, inasmuch as the 1870 census showed a population of 600, Bancroft's figure was probably fairly accurate. *Ibid.*, 102-03.
 16. East Florida Seminary, a coeducational institution chartered in 1853, was later moved to Gainesville. It is a parent of the University of Florida. *Ibid.*, 101; Samuel Proctor, "The University of Florida: Its Early Years, 1853-1906" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1958), 51.
 17. Lucretia (Mrs. Welcome Farnum) was Bancroft's sister, who often served as his able critic. Eliza, another of Bancroft's sisters, was the wife of John Davis, Whig governor of Massachusetts and brother of the second Mrs. Bancroft. Howe, *George Bancroft*, I, 17; Nye, *George Bancroft*, 120.

in amiable fellowship. The distance from Pilatka to this place is fifty five miles: the road level is passible [*sic*], but sandy & made rough by the knotty tough fibrous roots of the palmetto or the roots of the pine; the stagecoach a stout vehicle of wood, made to encounter the roads. The weather is a hot as our hottest midsummer weather, thermometer 84 or 87. Last night I slept with a window directly at the head of my bed wide open, & had nothing to hide me but a rugged sheet. The parts abound in cattle which are raised here very easily; and yet I could not for love or menace or importunity or money get a drop of milk or black tea at most places there is none; though at Pilatka a decoction of an article sold in the village at \$1.25 per pound is served up as such. Even at Pilatka we had no milk, till we made a noise about it. One night the buz[z] of a mosquito was most distinctly & long continuously audible. And yet with patience & discretion one gets along. You sleep on a thin hard mattress made of the native moss; and I do not object to its hardness; eggs & hominy are enough for any body; breakfast & bath in perfection; at dinner there is a plenty of venison and wild turkey. This morning I was helped to a piece of squirrel. Corn bread & hot cakes are universal; and then when the west wind from the gulf does blow, it has a tale to tell from Paradise itself. At night the sky is bright and cloudless; the north star crouches downward to the horizon, as if half afraid to tell the people of the South that there is a North.

[The following fragment probably describes Silver Springs which Bancroft visited when he was in Ocala.]

following up the stream to which it gives supplies, and being itself dark from shadows of the tall rock at whose foot it rises. Think here of flat sand, with magnolias, sweet berry trees, palmettos, wild cherry, live oak, cypress, black jack & hickory; & walk down a little and you come upon a place that looks for all the world like a cave; its outline not clearly defined; its diameter a hundred & twenty yards or more; and here you have a river rising up from the earth. Rowing upon the water the depth of the spring was about thirty five feet, some say forty seven feet four inches, the water is miraculously clear. The smallest matter at the bottom is perfectly distinct; every fish

is visible far as the eye can reach. The sun's rays play all kinds of fantastic tricks, as when they pass through the prism. Peering steadily you see a chasm in the white limestone through which the water bubbles up; and after learning to know them, you can discern several [springs]. The whole pool & every fountain & the large river that flows aft are thus transparently clear, the most perfectly pellucid that you can imagine. The water that boils up or rather flows up, for it comes in quiet majesty & fullness, the many fissures in the limeston, meets together-already having from the first a strong current, and flows aft in a broad full stream of great depth, scarcely ever less than ten or fifteen feet, and 80 feet or more wide for six miles to the Ocklawaha. The river is from the fish gushing up, at the fountain head so broad & deep, that steamboats may come up to a landing on the bank at the head of the fountain. Pity that the outline of the fountain is ragged & ill shaped; the land round about after rising a few feet is a []pine forest, though nearer the spring there is the variety of trees which I have mentioned. From Pilatka to the edge of the Spring I remember nothing but a sand plain with here & there a hammock. Such is this floating peninsula of Florida.

I believe I have not mentioned the mistletoe, that gathers in dense green clusters in the topmost bough of the tallest trees high above the moss; & looks as if it might serve for the nest of a condor

Orange Springs Saturday 9¹/₂ P.M. Leaving Ocala at about nine in the morning, it was long after the usual dinner hour, when we arrived at this place, where I find the best hotel thus far discovered in Florida. The place takes its name from one of the thousands of fountains for which the peninsula is famous. I should have been much struck with it, had I not already seen Silver Spring. There Sulphur water bubbles up, in a large sheet of transparent water, which flows off in a little brook. The hotel is crowded; the place has a great name as a safe winter's resort for invalids for all the physicians now send their patients in countless numbers to Florida. Know nothingism¹⁸ has found

18. Know-Nothingism, an anti-foreign and anti-Catholic political movement, reached its peak in the mid-1850s. Organized as the American party, in Florida it was an outgrowth of the Whig party and had less of an anti-Catholic bias than its national counterpart. Although it did

its way here and is regarded, (my authority is a baptist clergyman Mr Jones) as inspired by God to preserve the union and to overthrow & destroy the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The feeling here against Massachusetts is very strong and very bitter; and generally there prevails a subterranean current of discontent with the North.

Sunday March. 18. at Pilatka. I got back to this place through heat, that would be frightful in July; often over sandy dusty roads. A covey of partridges started up on the right; a mocking bird perched without singing or making a note on my left: here & there a clump of fresh honey suckle was in full bloom; in some places the pitchy woods were on fire, and the heat uncomfortable. But I have got back at last, & hope tomorrow night to sleep in St. Augustine. I find the house in this place full of persons come on to honor Miss Bronson's ¹⁹ wedding. Mrs Emmet & daughters peer above other visitors at the hotel.

I have nothing to add about Florida, except that its people are remarkably temperate. Cold water is the common beverage: and a law almost as efficient in practice as the Maine liquor law, throughs [*sic*] invincible obstacles in the way of grog shops. There are none.

I have a little request: in your next letter which you will address to Columbia, S.C., let me know if a volume of Force's American Archives ²⁰ has been sent me since I left home, & if so, what volume it is. Dinna forget. If none has come I need to know it, in order to get one at Washington.

I find the Strongs have left this place: I go tomorrow to Picolata, thence to St. Augustine; returning to Picolata, I shall make for Darien - thence to Savannah and Charleston with every effort I cannot reach Charleston before the 27th. After

not win the state and presidential vote in 1856, the Florida party successfully challenged Democrats in local elections in 1855 and 1856. Doherty, "Florida in 1856," 66-68; Arthur W. Thompson, "Political Nativism in Florida, 1848-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, XV (February 1949), 39-65.

19. Probably a daughter of Judge Isaac H. Bronson (1802-1855), whose home in Palatka was a social center. The residence is now referred to as the Mulholland House.
20. Peter Force's *American Archives* (Washington, 1837-53), was never completed, the last volume appearing in 1853.

a few days there I shall go to Columbia, if Mr. Preston ²¹ has returned.

Write me at once on receiving this & very fully to Columbia. My letter has grown long from the want of a mail. I have had no chance before to forward letters since Wednesday. Love to Sandy.

Ever dear wife your affectionate husband
George Bancroft.

St. Augustine P. M. 21 March '55. This dear wife will be my last missive from Florida. After putting my letter to you into the Post office, I joined a little party got up for my express benefit, & took a sail in the harbour & out towards the bar of St. Augustine, for I have lost my dread of the ocean. Mr Dorman, an invalid who comes to Florida-for health, owns a nice sailboat, & with his wife, Mrs. Baldwin & D^r Wheeler, we embarked together. The wind was brisk; the sea a little rough; we ran down the harbor rapidly, and landed on the beach on Anastasia Island. Here is abundance of the coquina the rock made of shells. The shore is one mass of broken shells; we saw many blocks, which if hewn out & put in a grotto would need no addition-they are already one mass of shells; those on the outside large & in beautiful state of preservation. Ascending the lighthouse, which is a revolving one, & is provided with one of the new french lamps, ²² we could see old ocean breaking in the long line of the bar, & the narrow passage through which Vessels

21. John Smith Preston (1809-1881) was born in Virginia, attended the University of Virginia, and studied law at Harvard. He moved to South Carolina in 1840 and served in the state senate. From 1856 to 1860 he lived in Europe. A radical champion of state rights, he returned to South Carolina on the eve of the war, was appointed commissioner to Virginia to urge that state to secede, served in various commands in the Confederate army, and was finally made superintendent of the Bureau of Conscription. His wife, Caroline Martha Hampton, daughter of Wade Hampton (1751-1835), inherited considerable wealth along with the Hampton mansion in Columbia. She entertained often and lavishly and the Hampton-Preston home was rarely without guests. Along with his brother, William Campbell Preston, John was a patron of the sculptor, Hiram Powers. Bancroft was interested in this artist's work as well as in the society and economic structure of the South Carolina upcountry. J. G. de Rouliac Hamilton, "John Smith Preston," in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, XV, 202-03; Helen Kohn Hennig, ed., *Columbia: Capital City of South Carolina, 1786-1936* (Columbia, 1936), 188, 244-45, 268-69; Bancroft to Elizabeth Bancroft, April 3, 5, 7, 9, 1855, Bancroft Papers.

22. This is probably a corruption for Fresnel, a lens named for the French physicist and optical pioneer, Auguste Jean Fresnel (1788-1827).



Bancroft is identified as fifty-four at the time of this picture which would make it contemporary with his Florida expedition. It is a reproduction of an engraving from *Memorial Exercises/George Bancroft, Worcester, Massachusetts*, reprinted from *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity*, October 1900.

enter. Then with a descending tide & a lee shore, we had to encounter some tail to set our boat into the water, for we had run it upon the beach where it was left high and dry. At last we were under weigh [*sic*]. The city nowhere shows to so good advantage as from the sea; for it lies so low, nothing but the water is lower. The old fort ²³ had a grave and venerable look, like well preserved mediaeval walls; the long narrow town seemed to loom up. My lady companions were excellent sailors, having perfect confidence in Mr. Dorman who managed helm & sail with great ease & skill. I never go about but I meet reminiscences: Mrs. Dorman, a fair, blue eyed, light haired, ringleted young woman was the daughter of good old Parson Guild of Southampton, at whose house I once passed a day when she was a child; & I a Northampton Schoolmaster. ²⁴

6 P. M. But time flies; I must hasten to close this letter. This afternoon Mr. Fairbanks ²⁵ called & took me to his own place & to Fort Moosa, ²⁶ so that now I have seen all the [ruins]. The abundance of oysters is one of the curiosities. I have just returned from a last look at the seaside. "Is your name Bancroft."

Because of their greater effectiveness in reflecting light, the lamps equipped with these lens were being installed in all lighthouses as required by act of Congress in 1851.

23. The Castillo de San Marcos was renamed Fort Marion in honor of General Francis Marion of Revolutionary War fame after the United States acquired Florida.
24. In 1823 Bancroft had been a co-founder of the Round Hill School, a boys school in Northampton, Massachusetts, with which he was affiliated until 1830 when he sold his interest. Nye, *George Bancroft*, 67-82.
25. George R. Fairbanks (1820-1906), lawyer and newspaper editor, was born in Watertown, New York, and in 1842 moved to St. Augustine, where he established a law practice. Onetime clerk of the territorial superior court and of the U.S. district court, and a member of the state senate (1846-48), he was a founder and a president of a number of organizations, including the Florida Historical Society, the Florida Fruit Growers' Association, and the Florida Press Association. He published numerous articles and books on Florida history. As a founder, lecturer, and for many years a trustee of the University of the South, at Sewanee, Tennessee, he wrote a history of that institution. During the Civil War he was a major in the Confederate Commissary Department. Watt Marchman, "The Florida Historical Society," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XIX (July 1940), 49-50.
26. Fort Moosa, site of an outpost on the North River, lay about two miles north of St. Augustine. It was occupied by James Oglethorpe in 1740 during his Florida campaign. In the 1850s there was still a road from St. Augustine to the site, and it could be reached by a tide-creek through the Maubes. See George R. Fairbanks, *History and Antiquities of St. Augustine, Florida* (Jacksonville, 1881), 77.

It is; & pray what is yours? "K. B. Gibbs.²⁷ I have your six volumes of history.²⁸ Fort Caroline was Aux Caroline I once thought at St. John's Bluff. I now think five miles higher up the Saint Johns. I built a mill at its mouth, & called it Mayport Mill, because Laudonniere called the place the river May." Make up your mind definitely & write me word. "I will."

Enclosed is a clipping from the Pilatka or as the fashion now is the Palatka paper; also a billet doux, which you are not to throw into the fire, but save for me; from my fellow sailor this morning Mrs. M. E. Dorman. Save it for me without fail.

Affectionately yours
George Bancroft

I suppose you know that the shale formations & other things prove Florida to be *at the least* 250,000 years old; how much more who can tell? I hope you are getting a good welcome ready for me. Long as I have life, I shall not forget the cordial one you gave me once on my return from France.

Write me *once more* to Columbia, S. C., & send some newspapers. Tis said Nicholas is dead;²⁹ people here wish he had first beating [*sic*] the unholy alliance of France & England.

Pray buy me a chaldron of Kennal coal at once; to be in readiness for me.

St. John's River. On board the Seminole.³⁰ Thursday
22 March 1855.

The streets of St. Augustine are much narrower than the people told me. I paced three of them, & found the widest twenty five feet; of the two others, one was scant twenty, the other hardly fifteen. After tea last evening, Mrs. Sophia Dunbar made me a present of a beautiful sort of plate, which she had been busy all day long in making for me out of the bits

27. Kingsley Beatty Gibbs was a native of Charleston. He had moved to Florida with his parents in 1821, because of his mother's poor health. Gibbs lived with his uncle, Zephaniah Kingsley, and helped manage Kingsley's plantation on Fort George Island. He inherited this property in 1843. He moved to St. Augustine in 1847. Marchman, "The Florida Historical Society," 51; Margaret Gibbs Watt, ed., *The Gibbs Family of Long Ago and Near at Hand, 1337-1967* (np., 1968), 29.

28. The sixth volume of Bancroft's *History of the United States* had appeared in 1854. Nye, *George Bancroft*, 190.

29. Czar Nicholas I of Russia died March 2, 1855.

30. The Seminole traveled between the St. Johns and Savannah. In service less than two years, she was destroyed by fire in December 1855, at her Jacksonville wharf. Mueller, "East Florida Steamboating," 255-56.

that go to make up the pine bur[r]. In the evening under a drenching shower, I made one or two farewell visits, especially to Mrs Carr, Sophia Blake that was, who has grown stout & is the mother of five girls & one boy. . . . I was very anxious not to miss the boat, paid my passage in advance; got the most solemn promises; & was told to be ready at 5 so I arose at half past four; lighted a pine knot: made a warm bright Haze, enjoyed it awhile & was ready to proceed. Not till 6¹/₂ did the coach appear; and the boat was on the point of starting, after having waited ³/₄ an hour, as I rushed on board. A moment later, & I must have waited two days at Picolata . . . Our point for today is Jacksonville. On board the Seminole I find the minister who tied the nuptial knot for Miss Bronson & who gave me some account of the wedding. He represents first Mrs. Bronson's health is wretched. One incident only of variety has transpired today. We went up the Black River as far as a boat can go; the banks all pink with a complet[e] flush of Azaleas; & the woods here & there showing a dogwood tree, one mass of white blossoms. Mr. Hoffman, the minister interested me very much by the account of the mission of which he forms a part at Cape Palmas. His self-devotedness to his office must be very great to sustain him in his solitude among the wild desolateness of African untamed luxuriance, with a thousand free negroes from Maryland as the only civilized residents outside of the mission;³¹ & for natives, the negro race in all the stupidity of heathenism.

Friday 23 March. We were to have left the wharf at Jacksonville at 3 A. M. I think it was nearer day break, when we got under way, & steamed magnificently down the St. Johns. Just before reaching the bar at the mouth of this wonderful river, the crank pin of one of our engines broke; & then we were luckily within the bar. Had we been at sea, the accident would have been more awkward. This brings with it a loss of two days, which I had appropriated; but heaven's will be done. We turned back with one engine moving slowly towards Jackson-

31. The colony of freedmen at Cape Palmas in southern Liberia, was established by the Maryland Colonization Society. After twenty years, the colonists asked for and in 1854 received their freedom. Beset by financial difficulties and exhausted by native uprisings, the Republic was forced to seek annexation by Liberia and, in 1857, became the Country of Maryland in the Liberian Republic. J. H. T. McPherson, *History of Liberia*, vol. IX of John Hopkins' University Studies (Baltimore, 1891), 31-36.

ville where alone we could hope to repair our loss. The morning was delightful: the sea very calm: it seemed to invite & promise a prosperous trip; but our poor boat was disabled. On this return I passed very near St. John's bluff, & also the spot where Gibbs of St. Augustine found the ruins of fortifications; I am persuaded that Laudonniere's party raised their Aux Carolina, on the St. John's bluff. It answers to their map & their whole account: only as the river washes the shore, it is probable that the exact spot on which the fort stood has been washed away. We reached this place at dinner. You would get a letter from me daily: but there is no mail to take one oftener than twice a week; & this week one of the two chances fails. This is the reason my dates run over so much time.

This evening was superbly beautiful. Before Sundown I strolled down the town and up; seeing the saw-mills & the glorious river, & the magnificent sunset, & enjoying the air which if a little cool was balmy & fresh, and full of the feeling of spring. After dark the river rose superbly, & the stars twinkled with tropical brightness. Goodnight. My bed-room has a window which will not shut; & a pane broken. But welcome the night-breeze.

Your affectionate Geo. Bancroft.

Jacksonville March 24/55. Still detained at Jacksonville. Our boat cannot be ready 'till tomorrow; & the Florida does not arrive. Well, it is no use to repine. I began a stroll into the Forest, when who should pass but Dr. Baldwin in his gig. "I have finished my morning's round with my patients; let me now drive you into the woods." The very thing. So I have been to see the Sand Hills, for said he a Northerner likes so to see hills. These are thirty feet, possibly forty five feet high. The swamp at their base was full of Azaleas in full bloom, of dogwood (cornus Florida) of magnolias brilliant in their shining green, but not yet budded; various kinds of bay-tree; moss; & an air plant, a grass which bears a very pretty flower as he says. It was already budded. We visited also a spring, one of the many in this land of Fountains, bubbling up in a running brook.

25 Left Jacksonville got aground after passing Simon's Island[.]

26 1¹/₂ P. M. After a succession of [mishaps] I am arrived near Savannah where I hope to find letters. G. B.