

1991

Tampa's James McKay and the Frustration of Confederate Cattle-Supply Operations in South Florida

Canter Brown, Jr.



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Brown, Jr., Canter (1991) "Tampa's James McKay and the Frustration of Confederate Cattle-Supply Operations in South Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 70 : No. 4 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol70/iss4/3>

TAMPA'S JAMES MCKAY AND THE FRUSTRATION OF CONFEDERATE CATTLE-SUPPLY OPERATIONS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

by CANTER BROWN, JR.

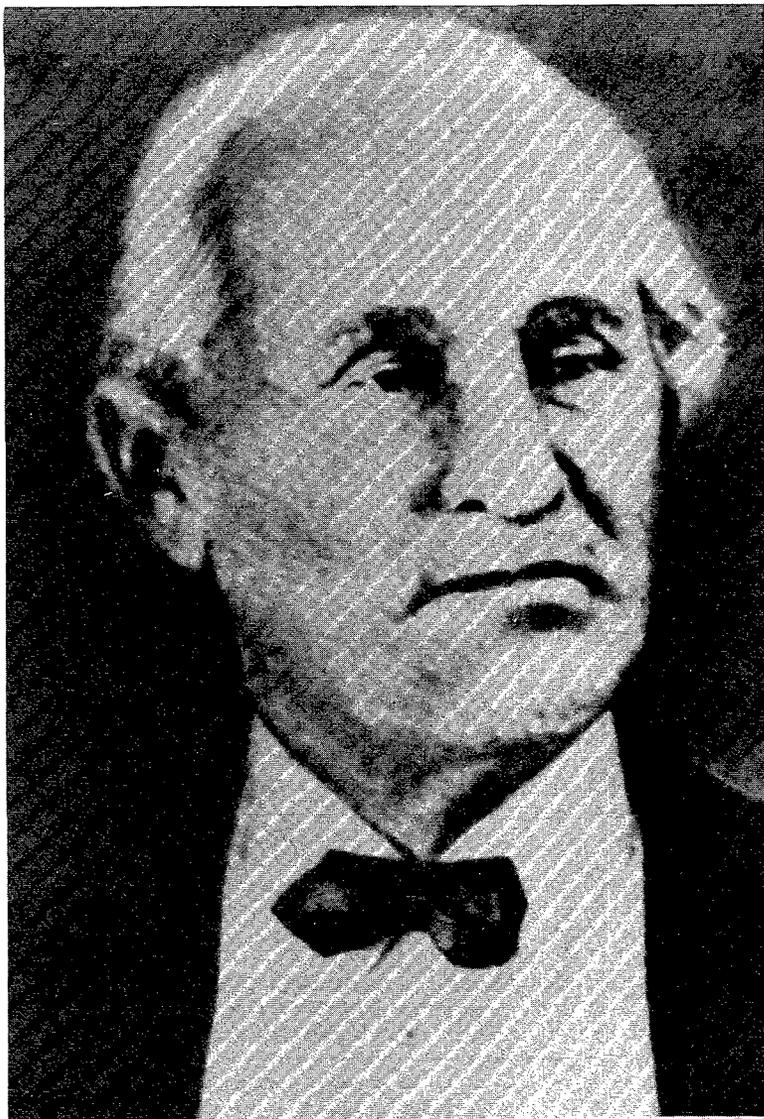
BY the summer of 1863, the availability of beef and other provisions from Florida was crucial to Confederate forces east of the Mississippi. The fall of Vicksburg in July had barred access to western beef, and food stocks in the East were nearly depleted. In October, the situation was so critical that one Army of Tennessee supply officer pleaded with Florida's commissary agent: "I cannot too strongly urge upon you the necessity, yes, the urgency, of sending forward cattle promptly. It appears that all other resources are exhausted." The following day he added, "I assure you that nearly all now depends on you."¹

With Confederate armies increasingly dependent upon Florida food, Union and Confederate leaders turned their attention to the southern portion of the state, where most cattle were ranged. By the spring of 1864, that area was the focus of bitter civil war as Union men and Confederates— primarily south Floridians on both sides— fought to control the cattle supply.²

The supply problem that was the basis of this confrontation affected strategy and campaigning by Confederate armies, particularly the Army of Tennessee.³ The extent of its impact, though, has not easily been discernable. Confederate leaders believed, at least until near the war's end, that Florida cattle-supply operations were conducted in good faith for the benefit of their war effort. Civil War historians have accepted the same

Canter Brown, Jr., is a resident of Gainesville, Florida.

1. Richard D. Goff, *Confederate Supply* (Durham, NC, 1969), 202; Robert A. Taylor, "Rebel Beef: Florida Cattle and the Confederate Army, 1862-1864," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (July 1988), 15-31; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), series 1, XXVIII, part 1, 472 (hereinafter, *OR*).
2. Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida's Peace River Frontier* (Orlando, 1991), 155-75.
3. Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 184, 192.



Captain James McKay I. Photograph was reproduced from Gary R. Mormino and Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City* (Tulsa, OK, 1983), 49. Original from Helen McKay Bardowsky Collection.

premise. Affairs in south Florida were complicated, however, and available evidence indicates that many of the area's most-prominent cattlemen withheld the bulk of their herds from Confederate use. South Florida's commissary officer, James McKay, cooperated in this effort, but he also may have undermined the supply operation in a more fundamental way. From the spring of 1862 until the end of the war, he may have been a covert agent of the United States government.⁴

McKay was born in Scotland, March 17, 1808. He immigrated to the United States about 1835, eventually settling in Mobile. In 1846, his attention was drawn to business possibilities in Florida, which had become a state the year before, and he transferred his family to the little village of Tampa. There, he opened a store, served as a building contractor, and speculated in land. Two years later he purchased a schooner and commenced a shipping business between Tampa, Mobile, and New Orleans.⁵

McKay's business success took hold in the 1850s when he secured a contract as sutler for Fort Myers, then an isolated United States Army post. Described later in life as "gentlemanly and kind to everyone he meets," McKay was an easy man to know.⁶ At the post, he and his associates, among them cattleman Francis Asbury Hendry, became friends with many regular-army officers, including Lieutenant Henry Benson, Major William Henry French, and Colonel Harvey Brown. Since south Florida at the time was a sparsely populated frontier, chances for social

-
4. As to the "good-faith" interpretation of Florida cattle-supply operations, see William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 268-95; John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963; reprint ed., Macclenny, 1989), 161-65; Taylor, "Rebel Beef"; Robert A. Taylor, "Rebel Beef: Florida Cattle and the Confederacy, 1861-1865" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 1985); Robert A. Taylor, "A Problem of Supply: Pleasant White and Florida's Cow Cavalry" in John M. Belohlavek and Lewis N. Wynne, eds., *Divided We Fall: Essays on Confederate Nation Building* (St. Leo, 1991), 177-202.
 5. Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 319; Donald B. McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, 3 vols. (Tampa, 1959), II, 25.
 6. Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Fort Myers: The History of the Land of the Caloosahatchee and Southwest Florida* (Fort Myers, 1949; reprint ed., Fort Myers Beach, 1982), 64-65; Grismer, *Tampa*, 319; "Journal of Geo. F. Thompson, as Inspector, Bureau Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands, on a tour of central Florida and the lower West Coast, Dec. 1865," 83, box 24, misc. mss. collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville (hereinafter, PKY).

relationships were few, and a military post offered such possibilities for a man's family as well as for himself. Hendry later explained how friendships arose at Fort Myers: "The officers and men were very kind to me, and socially it was very pleasant to live among them. Some of the officers and soldiers had their wives and children with them, and made it very pleasant for my wife."⁷ As events were to prove, friendships made and favors exchanged in that environment were not quickly forgotten.

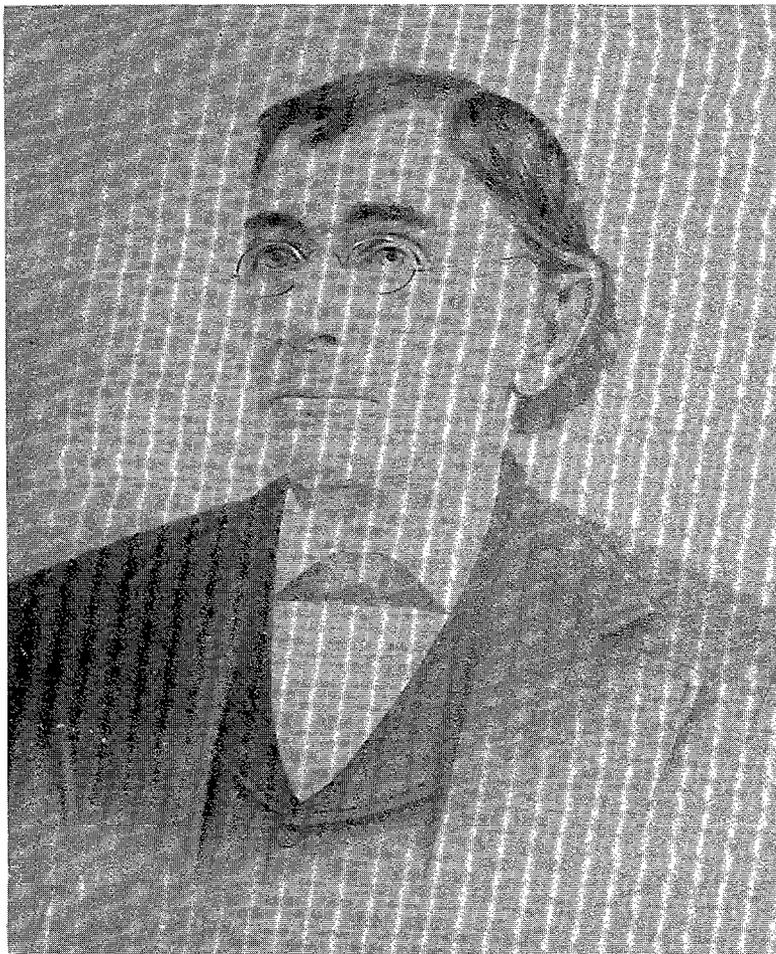
The last of Florida's Indian wars—the Third Seminole, or Billy Bowlegs War—ended in May 1858. The peace opened for cattlemen vast ranges near the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee. Coincidentally, troops were withdrawn from Fort Myers leaving McKay without a source of income. "[M]y only alternative in business left to me after the troops leaving Florida . . ." he recorded, "was the transportation of cattle to Havana." Accordingly, McKay leased a steamboat and commenced a cattle-shipping business. The act made him a hero among area cattlemen who were desperate for viable markets.⁸

McKay first based his shipping business on Tampa Bay. Although he dealt with scores of owners—most south Floridians had some cattle—his principal early associates were Hendry, William Brinton Hooker, and Jacob Summerlin. Only twenty-four years of age in 1858, Hendry was the junior man of the group. Hooker prior to the war had the largest herd, but Summerlin quickly emerged as the area's leading cattleman. He possessed in the eyes of his contemporaries a larger-than-life personality, which an observer noted in 1865: "Mr. Summerlin is a man of naturally great will power, but devoid of culture in any of the refinements of life. The poor look up to him as their superior and receive his ideas as law."⁹ Summerlin's leadership ability,

7. Francis Asbury Hendry, *Early History of Lee County and Fort Myers* (privately printed, n.d.), n.p.; Bartow *Polk County Record*, March 7, 1922.

8. James W. Covington, *The Billy Bowlegs War, 1855-1858: The Final Stand of the Seminoles Against the Whites* (Chuluota, 1981), 79; Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 146; James McKay to Harvey Brown, June 10, 1861, Letters and Reports Received, 1861-66, record group 393, part I, entry 1654, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereinafter, NA);

9. James McKay account book, 1850-1868, Special Collections, University of South Florida Library, Tampa; Spessard Stone, "Francis Asbury Hendry 1833-1917," *South Florida Pioneers* 33/34 (July/October 1982), 18-23; Kyle S. VanLandingham, "William Brinton Hooker 1800-1871," *South Florida Pioneers* 5 (July 1975), 6-12; John Solomon Otto, "Hillsborough County (1850): A Community in the South Florida Flatwoods," *Florida Historical*



Jacob Summerlin, c. 1890. *Collection of the author.*

coupled with McKay's energy and enterprise, served as the foundation of south Florida's cattle business.

Summerlin and McKay's partnership was, simple. They purchased cattle for \$3 to \$8 a head and sold them in Havana

Quarterly 62 (October 1983), 189-90; Kissimmee *Osceola Sun*, September 11, 1975; Joe A. Akerman, Jr., *Florida Cowman, A History of Florida Cattle Raising* (Kissimmee, 1976), 55, 85; "Journal of Geo. F. Thompson," 81.

for \$10-\$12 in Spanish gold coin. In 1859, 679 beeves were shipped and, in the following year, 4,016. As his prosperity boomed with the cattle business, McKay took an increasingly strong role in Tampa business and political affairs. In both he associated closely with a group of men that included, among others, Hooker, merchant Madison Post, and lawyers Joseph M. Taylor and James Gettis. Politically, they battled the regular Hillsborough County— as opposed to town of Tampa’s— Democratic party which loosely was centered upon lawyer and former legislator James T. Magbee. McKay’s faction in 1858 ousted Magbee from his important federal position as collector of the port of Tampa, and the following year McKay was elected to a one-year term as mayor. In 1860, however, Magbee managed a comeback by defeating Hooker’s son-in-law for election as southwest Florida’s state senator.¹⁰

By 1860, McKay’s personal and business affairs were in good order. He purchased that year a new and larger steamer, the *Salvor*. When a disastrous drought killed several thousand cattle awaiting shipment at Tampa, however, he and Summerlin moved their loading operations south to Charlotte Harbor and the mouth of the Peace River. In the wilderness near modern Punta Gorda, they constructed an 800-foot loading dock and wharf, and in November 1860— as the nation was electing Abraham Lincoln as its president— they commenced cattle shipping from that point.¹¹

Florida seceded from the Union— the third state to do so— on January 10, 1861. The action was not submitted for popular approval, though, and support for the Union was widespread. “[I]n Florida a very large minority were opposed to secession,” then-Governor John Milton wrote Jefferson Davis in 1862, “and in many parts of the State combinations existed to adhere to and maintain the United States Government.”¹² Milton informed Confederate Secretary of War George W. Randolph that “[t]here

10. Akerman, *Florida Cowman*, 55; Tampa *Sunland Tribune*, July 21, 1877; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, May 1, 1858, July 17, August 20, 1859, July 14, 1860; Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, 126-29, 132-34; McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, II, 25.

11. James McKay [Jr.], “History of Tampa of the Olden Days,” *Tampa Daily Times*, December 18, 1923. This article has been reprinted as “Reminiscences of Capt. James McKay, Jr.” in *Sunland Tribune* 17 (1991), 78-87.

12. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 11-22; John Milton to Jefferson Davis, September 23, 1862, in *OR*, series 4, II, 92.

is not within my knowledge a portion of the State free of skulking traitors."¹³ Among the Unionists were many south Floridians. "The people from whom I was obtaining cattle, numbering about 150 persons, or families," McKay later explained, "never could see any benefit they could derive by breaking up the Govt., but to the contrary." Francis A. Hendry and Jacob Summerlin were Unionist. McKay stated of himself: "I stood in the front rank in my section of country, resisting with all my might the pestiferous progress of disunion sentiment."¹⁴

Summerlin and McKay responded to the crisis by accelerating their shipping operations at Peace River. On January 1, 1861, McKay purchased 10,000 head of cattle from Hooker. Thereafter, he made run after run from Florida to Cuba. "Ever since November, 1860, up till June, 1861," he recalled, "I was not at Tampa or with my family ten days all put together, being attending to my cattle operations from Charlotte Harbor to Havana."¹⁵ His interest was not partisan. Rather, his goal was a pragmatic one—to transport as much beef as possible before Union or Confederate authorities put a stop to the trade.

In the confusion of early 1861, no one in Confederate-dominated Tampa or Union-controlled Key West interfered with McKay's operations. Although tensions were heightened after President Lincoln's March 5 decision to reinforce Pensacola's Fort Pickens, the trade continued. On April 6, the captain enjoyed an additional stroke of luck. The *Salvor* was at Key West when some of McKay's old friends from Fort Myers arrived in town. Major William H. French, who had refused to surrender his Texas-based forces upon that state's secession, had brought his men to Key West where he assumed command of United States troops. "The major and some of my old acquaintances came on board," McKay remembered, "all of whom I was pleased

13. Milton to George W. Randolph, August 5, 1862, in *OR*, series 1, LII, part II, supp., 336.

14. McKay to William H. Seward, February 11, 1862, General Records of the Department of State, Civil War Papers, Corr. Regarding Prisoners of War, 1861-62, box 7, record group 59, entry 491, NA (hereinafter, Prisoner of War files); "Petition of Jacob Summerlin," September 12, 1865, Case Files of Applications from Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 1865-67, record group 94, M-1003, roll 15, NA (hereinafter, Pardon files); Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 14, 1893.

15. Hillsborough County, Deed Book C, 200, Hillsborough County Courthouse, Tampa; McKay to Lorenzo Thomas, December 7, 1861, in *OR*, Series 2, II, 967.

to see." During the reunion, a "flat" carrying some Union-army men began to drift to sea, and McKay obliged officials by steaming to the rescue.¹⁶

McKay's good fortune continued. Colonel Harvey Brown—also a Fort Myers associate— was named commander of the Department of Florida and ordered to relieve Fort Pickens. The colonel arrived at Key West on April 13 and issued orders reinforcing Major French's authority as well as that of another of McKay's "true friend[s]," United States District Court Judge William Marvin. Lieutenant Henry Benson, yet another acquaintance, shortly asked McKay to supply beef to Union troops at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas. The captain responded by offering a bargain. He would supply the beef and, in the future, allow the army's contractor to use his facilities at Peace River; in return, the Union army would not interfere with his Florida-to-Cuba cattle trade. According to McKay, Benson agreed.¹⁷

Word of McKay's efforts on behalf of the Union forces soon spread to Tampa. Unfortunately for the captain, the news arrived concurrently with reports of the firing upon and surrender of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. At a public meeting, residents resolved against any future shipments of beef to Key West. Unaware of the action, McKay returned to Key West from Havana with horses for French's artillery battery. The major then asked the captain to transport several secessionists to Cedar Key, and McKay complied.¹⁸

After dropping his passengers, McKay returned to a suddenly hostile Tampa. He already had concluded that his days of cattle shipping were numbered and previously had offered to sell the *Salvor* to Confederate authorities. A naval official had arrived during his absence to examine the vessel, but a trip on Tampa Bay convinced the officer that "she drew too much water for

16. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 45-49; Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and The New* (St. Augustine, 1912; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1973), 92; McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861.

17. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War*, 46-47; Browne, *Key West*, 214-15; James McKay [Jr.] to "My dear Father," n.d., in Julius J. Gordon, ed., "The Missions of Tampa": Excerpts from the Diary of Father Clavreul, 1866-1873," *Tampa Bay History* 13 (Fall/Winter 1991), 64-65; McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861.

18. Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, May 11, 1861; *New York Evening Express*, May 21, 1861; McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861.

inside work and was not fast enough for outside work."¹⁹ He, therefore, declined the purchase. The rejection notwithstanding, McKay continued to arrange his affairs before it was too late. Particularly, on May 31 he transferred title to the cattle he had purchased from Hooker to his partner, Summerlin. He then departed with another shipment of cattle for Key West and Havana.²⁰

McKay's luck abandoned him on June 7, the day he arrived at Key West from Havana. Word of the Confederate States' interest in the *Salvor* had leaked both to French and to Flag Officer William Mervine, commander of the Gulf Blockading Squadron. Mervine ordered the *Salvor* detained and barred McKay from returning to Tampa. The following day the naval officer established a general blockade of Key West.²¹

In the face of Mervine's action, McKay appealed to the highest Union official with whom he enjoyed a personal relationship. On June 10, he wrote Harvey Brown at Pensacola, pleading that the steamer be leased for army use. Ten days later he reported to Brown that French's quartermaster "has employed my steamer with a view of purchase if approved of by you." He also noted that "through the goodness" of French, he had been allowed to leave Key West for home.²² At that point, events began to swirl far out of McKay's control.

After a rough passage in a fishing smack, the captain arrived at Tampa on June 26. Soon after his landing, "a pretended organized Co of troops" – the Sunny South Guards commanded by Captain John T. Lesley – seized the fishing smack, "stating that she belonged to *Unionists*."²³ When McKay managed through Florida Governor Madison Starke Perry to have the smack released, the soldiers burned it. McKay and his friends were com-

19. McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861; McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days."

20. Hillsborough County, Deed Book C, 201; *New York Tribune*, June 25, 1861.

21. *New York Tribune*, June 25, 1861; William H. French to Thomas, October 17, 1861, Letters Deceived by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series), 1861-70, M-619, roll 22, NA; United States War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington, DC, 1894-1922), series 1, XVI, 530-31 (hereinafter, *ORN*).

22. McKay to Brown, June 10, 1861.

23. McKay to Thomas, October 20, 1861, M-619, roll 22, NA; McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862; Theodore Lesley, "The Sunny South Guards Was Tampa's Elite Military Unit At Outbreak of the Civil War," *Tampa Tribune*, December 6, 1959.

pelled to ask the governor to clarify for Captain Lesley that his authority was subject to that of their friend, militia Colonel William I. Turner.²⁴

McKay's problems were just beginning. Rumors were circulating in the area, as he later recalled, "that I was a general agent for the [United States] Government and a traitor and should be hung."²⁵ Disturbed by the "utter reckless & wicked disposition of the rabble," the captain quickly made his way north to confer with the governor. Perhaps reassured, he returned home to discover that state charges had been preferred against him for treason.²⁶

Incidents occurring in July set the stage for McKay's arrest and subsequent trial. On the first, the Sunny South Guards were mustered into regular Confederate service at Tampa, no doubt prompting passions on the part of area secessionists. Coincidentally, the Union blockading vessel *R. R. Cuyler* arrived at Tampa Bay. Within days the *Florida Peninsular*, Tampa's newspaper, reported that Egmont Key at the mouth of the bay had been occupied by Union forces and that a battery of three cannon had been erected on the shore facing Tampa. Also, McKay published an open letter in the *Peninsular* blaming his troubles upon his old political adversary State Senator James T. Magbee. Magbee, in turn, denounced McKay in the paper as Tampa's equivalent of Benedict Arnold. These events occurred as news of the First Battle of Bull Run arrived. Volunteer prosecutor Magbee thereupon filed charges against McKay of petty treason.²⁷

McKay's trial was held before two justices of the peace at the county courthouse on August 10. Magbee prosecuted the case with vigor and demanded death by hanging. One observer described the ordeal as "long and acrimonious."²⁸ Cattlemen associates of McKay's offered, in his words, "to come in mass and

24. John Darling et al. to Madison Starke Perry, June 27, 1861, folder 3, box 1, State Governors, Incoming Correspondence, 1857-1888, record group 101, series 577, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter, FSA).

25. McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861.

26. McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862.

27. Lesley, "Sunny South Guards"; *New Orleans Bee*, July 10, 1861; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, quoted in *New Orleans Bee*, August 6, 1861; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, October 24, 1868.

28. Witness expense voucher for Peter Cursoe, August 20, 1861, Comptroller's Vouchers, Criminal Prosecutions, folder 4, box 3, record group 350, series 565, FSA; Tampa *Sunland Tribune*, October 26, 1878; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, October 24, 1868.

break up the justice court," but the defendant declined their efforts.²⁹ McKay did have help, however. His defense was ably conducted by future Republican Governor Ossian Bingley Hart, a Tampa Unionist, and James Gettis, McKay's personal lawyer and a northern-born secessionist. Also, McKay's friend, militia Brigadier General Joseph M. Taylor, as a local man put it, "sat himself on the trial."³⁰ In the end, the justices avoided judgment by binding the captain over for a new trial at the October term of the circuit court. They also placed him under \$10,000 bond.³¹

Upon his release, McKay immediately arranged to leave for Key West. Perhaps seriously, or else to provide a plausible excuse for his departure, he approached local Confederate officials for permission to run cattle from Charlotte Harbor to Havana in a "Spanish vessel."³² He also arranged for his friend, General Taylor, to visit the Union blockading vessel at Tampa Bay under a flag of truce to secure permission for McKay, McKay's young son Donald, and several others to pass through the blockade. Captain Francis B. Ellison of the *R. R. Cuyler*, as McKay recalled, "very kindly consented."³³ He then secured a schooner and departed Tampa on August 13. Near Cape Roman on the lower Gulf coast, the vessel became disabled and, subsequently, was beset by a hurricane. For three days and nights the ship, its crew, and passengers rode out a "terrific" storm, and the party did not reach Key West until August 19.³⁴

The ordeal of the past several months had taken its toll on McKay. One individual reported that, upon his Key West arrival, the captain "expressed disgust at the Confederate rule in Florida." McKay, the observer recalled, added that "he desired to remove his family to some place within the jurisdiction of the United States, dispose of his property at Tampa and vicinity and

29. McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862.

30. Tampa *Sunland Tribune*, October 26, 1878; Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, October 24, 1868; Petition of Citizens of Clear Water Harbor, August 15, 1861, folder 3, box 1, State Governors, Incoming Correspondence, 1857-1888, record group 101, series 577, FSA.

31. McKay to Thomas, October 20, 1861.

32. McKay to A. Delaunay, August 11, 1861, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of the Treasury, 1861-1865, M-499, roll 38, NA.

33. McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862; Petition of Citizens of Clear Water Harbor, August 15, 1861.

34. Statement of Adolphus N. Pacetti, n.d., Pacetti family file, St. Augustine Historical Society Research Library, St. Augustine.

turn over the *Salvor* to the Government of the United States.³⁵ Unfortunately, the government did not want to purchase the *Salvor* – which was lying idle with boiler trouble– although its agents did pay him \$1,026 in lease fees. McKay then looked to Havana, from which he had received an offer of either a lucrative charter arrangement or a purchase for \$38,000. After promising not to return to the Confederate States in the *Salvor* and also to bring a shipment of horses back to Major French, he was permitted to depart for Cuba.³⁶

The Cuban offer for the *Salvor* had been withdrawn by the time McKay reached the island. After exploring his options, he decided to have the vessel repaired preparatory to a possible sale at Nassau. To protect himself from seizure by the blockade, he transferred title to a Scottish friend who arranged British registration for the boat. He also lade on a cargo of hats, shoes, cigars, coffee, gin, fruit, and– reportedly– pistols and percussion caps. On October 13, he departed Havana for Nassau but detoured toward the Tortugas and the Florida mainland, as he later asserted, to dispatch “my young son and negroes in a boat and send them home and for him to inform the court there [Tampa] the impossibility of my getting home.”³⁷

The detour, if it was a detour, quickly disrupted McKay’s plans. Prior to his departure, the American consul at Havana had sent word of the captain’s cargo to French. That officer alerted his naval counterpart who, in turn, dispatched the *Keystone State* to intercept the *Salvor*. The Union ship captured McKay’s steamer late that evening about twenty miles south of the Tortugas. When it was brought in to Key West, French immediately boarded the vessel. He subsequently ordered McKay’s arrest, a step that was to prove very helpful to McKay. The prisoner was confined at Fort Taylor, an action that upset the captain of the *Keystone State* who demanded his custody. French refused to turn McKay over and was seconded by United States District Judge William Marvin. Marvin, French, and other local officials then attempted to detain the *Salvor* within the jurisdiction of Marvin’s admiralty court, even to the point of ordering

35. L. D. Stickney to Seward, February 11, 1862, in *OR*, series 2, II, 977.

36. McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861; McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862; French to Thomas, October 17, 1861.

37. McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861.

the arrest of the *Keystone State's* captain. That officer refused to submit, however, and soon steamed with his prize for the North.³⁸

The seizure and removal of the *Salvor* to a northern prize court was a financial disaster to McKay, but French's and Marvin's actions legally rebounded in his favor. They arranged for the captain's case to be taken before a friendly Key West Federal grand jury. The jury declined to indict since the evidence—the *Salvor* and its cargo—then was at Philadelphia. Meanwhile, McKay was detained at Fort Taylor. "I am comfortable . . .," he related during his imprisonment, "as the Gents here know me and what my course and conduct has been since these troubles commenced." He wrote letters pleading for assistance, particularly to United States Army Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas whom he had met in New York the previous year. He also suggested to Thomas that the government procure the *Salvor*. "I would prefer my property in the Hands of the Federal Govt which is known to those in authority here," he told Thomas, "but I can not have it so expressed to go home, my family and all I possess after many years hard work is in Florida."³⁹

The pleas first showed results in December when Secretary of State William H. Seward requested the United States marshal at New York to examine the *Salvor's* crew who then were incarcerated at Fort Lafayette. That officer, on December 13, reported that the men had had no intention to run the blockade. Judge Marvin personally delivered to the adjutant general another letter from McKay and, likely, added his own words of support. The Department of State subsequently requested the captain's release from custody and directed him to report to the secretary of state. Authorities at Key West complied on January 23, 1862; Seward approved release of the *Salvor's* crew on January 29; and McKay arrived in Washington about February 1.⁴⁰

McKay spent almost ten weeks in Washington. The period was an exciting time for Unionists. In February 1862, Ulysses S. Grant and his men captured Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee, and Nashville, the state's capital, surrendered. In March, General George B. McClellan and his Army of the Potomac

38. French to Thomas, October 17, 1861; McKay to Seward, February 11, 1862; *New York Herald*, October 25, 1861.

39. B. H. Hill to Thomas, December 7, 1861, in *OR*, series 2, II, 966-71; McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861; McKay to Thomas, October 20, 1861.

40. Robert Murray to Seward, December 13, 1861, and February 3, 1862, and McKay to Thomas, December 7, 1861, in *OR*, series 2, II, 957, 966-71, 976.

finally embarked upon the Peninsula campaign, and preparations were underway for a Federal naval assault upon New Orleans. The Confederacy, reeling from its losses and a paucity of volunteers, in April passed the first conscription act in United States history.⁴¹

During the period, Florida also was on the minds of Union leaders, including President Abraham Lincoln. By mid-March, the state's principal Atlantic coastal towns— Fernandina, Jacksonville, and St. Augustine were in Union hands or were about to be. As those gains were finalized and consolidated, Lincoln granted an interview to Lyman D. Stickney, a former Vermont lawyer with business interests at the abandoned Fort Myers. During their discussion of "Florida affairs," Stickney mentioned James McKay's case, a matter he— Stickney— already had broached with Secretary Seward. On March 19, Stickney followed up the talk with a letter to Lincoln in which he pledged himself "for Captain McKay's future good conduct and loyalty to your Administration." He added: "If permitted to return to Florida via Key West [McKay] will co-operate with the Union forces, and . . . would be extremely valuable to the Government. Captain McKay owns many thousand head of beef-cattle in Florida which he will furnish to the Gulf Squadron and troops stationed in that region." The following day, the president forwarded the letter to Seward. "Please read this," Lincoln requested, "and speak with me about [it] at our next interview."⁴²

The details of Lincoln's interview with Seward are unknown, but on the day of the president's endorsement— March 20, 1862— McKay was allowed to sign an oath of allegiance to the United States. Soon Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Flag Officer William W. McKean, commander of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron, were corresponding about the occupation of Tampa, and naval officials had informed Brigadier General John M. Brannan, commanding the District of Key West, that

41. E. B. Long, *The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865* (Garden City, NY, 1971), 165-97.

42. Stickney to Abraham Lincoln, March 19, 1862, in OR, series 2, II, 981-82; Ovid L. Futch, "Salmon P. Chase and Civil War Politics in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 32 (January 1954), 162-63; Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction 1863-1877* (Gainesville, 1974), 6-10.

"30,000 cattle were ready to be sold [at Tampa] to the U.S. as soon as it could be done with safety to the owners."⁴³

Released from custody with his son, McKay was at Key West by April 21. After discussions with General Brannan, he again wrote the adjutant general. "You may rest assured," McKay told Thomas, "of everything in my power being done for the restoration of the Union."⁴⁴ After discussing with McKay plans for the imminent occupation of Tampa, Brannan arranged for the former prisoner of war to pass unmolested through the blockade. "[McKay] has given me and the Government assurances," the general asserted to McKean, "that he will use his utmost endeavor to cause the people in that vicinity to return to their allegiance."⁴⁵

As McKay and his son sailed to Tampa, the former prisoner likely looked forward to a quick end to the war. The spring had witnessed triumphant Union victories, including successes in Florida and, most recently, New Orleans. At the very least, he could anticipate an early Union seizure of Tampa and prosperous times selling beef to the United States government. Even the town's occupation probably caused him little worry. Before his departure from Washington one northern newspaper reported that Tampa's Confederates had "grown desperate since the loss of Fort Donelson," and— as General Brannan no doubt informed him, if he did not already know— his [McKay's] son-in-law, West Point graduate Robert Brenham Thomas, then was commanding the troops at Fort Brooke.⁴⁶

Any dreams McKay held of a peaceful future were shattered, however, soon after his mid-May arrival at Tampa. Confederate forces blunted Union drives at Shiloh and on the Peninsula. At home, a fiercely secessionist company of Confederate troops—the Oklawaha Rangers, captained by John W. Pearson— was stationed at Fort Brooke in place of Thomas's men. The Rangers quickly set about "scouring the woods, looking after deserters

43. Oath of allegiance, James McKay of Tampa, Florida, March 20, 1862, Prisoner of War files; William W. McKean to Gideon Welles, April 23, 1862, in *ORN*, series 1, XVII, 218-19; J. M. Brannan to Thomas, April 19, 1862, Department of the South, Letters Received, box 1, record group 393, NA.

44. McKay to Thomas, April 24, 1862, in *OR*, series 2, II, 981-82.

45. Brannan to McKean, May 7, 1862, Letters Sent, Department and District of Key West, Florida, vol. 61, record group 393, part I, entry 2266, NA.

46. Long, *Civil War Day By Day*, 202-04; *Boston Daily Journal*, March 21, 1862; *Tampa Tribune*, January 26, 1901; Grismer, *Tampa*, 141.

and conscripts.” They further reduced local morale by plundering private gardens “as fast as any edibles are produced.” More important, they were prepared to resist any attack.⁴⁷

The Union assault upon Tampa came on June 30, 1862. As if the act was a mere formality, the captain of the Union warship *Sagamore* dispatched a lieutenant and twenty men to request the town’s unconditional capitulation. Pearson rejected the demand, remarking that he did not “understand the meaning of the word surrender.”⁴⁸ That evening the Federal force bombarded Tampa for an hour and, in turn, was shelled from Fort Brooke. The following morning the *Sagamore* again opened fire, but shortly after noon it departed the bay. “They went away,” a local minister reported, “by a gracious providence having done no damage to either man or beast, house or fence.”⁴⁹ Tampa would not be occupied by Union forces for over twenty-two months.⁵⁰

The Oklawaha Rangers remained in Tampa until October 1863. Their presence stifled most overt resistance to Confederate rule, although many area men “lay[ed] out” to avoid conscription.⁵¹ Summerlin meanwhile contracted with the Confederate government to supply beef, and his associates earned substantial sums in Confederate currency and bonds. Francis A. Hendry alone received \$50,000 during June-September 1862. McKay—initially in partnership with Summerlin—returned to blockade running. Utilizing the small, slow *Scottish Chief*, he passed unmolested through the increasingly tight Union blockade six times. Although Florida law enacted in November 1861 forbade the exportation of beef and other food supplies, he first shipped cattle but later turned to more-lucrative cotton. The ship’s crew had just finished loading cargo for a seventh voyage when the vessel was burned by a Union raiding party.⁵²

47. Zack C. Waters, “Florida’s Confederate Guerrillas: John W. Pearson and the Oklawaha Rangers,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70 (October 1991), 142.

48. *Ibid.*, 140.

49. Augusta [GA] *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 14, 1862.

50. Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, 167. See also William J. Schellings, ed., “On Blockade Duty in Florida Waters: Excerpts From a Union Naval Officer’s Diary,” *Tequesta* 15 (1955), 62-63; and Frank Falero, Jr., “Naval Engagements in Tampa Bay, 1862,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46 (October 1967), 137-38.

51. Waters, “Florida’s Confederate Guerrillas,” 143; Kyle S. VanLandingham, “William Alderman 1838-1893: A Pioneer Settler of Manatee County,” *South Florida Pioneers* 4 (April 1975), 2.

52. Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, 148-52; McKay, “History of Tampa of the Olden Days”; Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida*, 183.

By the time the *Scottish Chief* was destroyed on October 13, 1863, McKay had fully re-established himself in the Tampa area. His blockade-running adventures— which had brought in needed goods, as well as gold for the suppliers of his cargoes— had restored his popularity. The indictment against him effectively was dismissed by a grand jury whose foreman was Madison Post. He even was readmitted to the local Masonic lodge from which he had been expelled eight years previously. The captain also avenged himself politically. In October 1862, he was elected to the Hillsborough County commission and saw General Joseph M. Taylor unseat his nemesis, James T. Magbee, from the state senate.⁵³

As McKay consolidated his position at Tampa, supply problems continued to plague Confederate armies, forcing increased reliance upon Florida beef. In response, recently elected Florida Governor John Milton decided that the state needed a comprehensive network of commissary agents to facilitate and maximize the shipment of cattle. He quickly appointed Quincy lawyer Pleasant W. White to act as the network's chief officer. As agent for the south Florida district that covered the state's largest ranges, White turned to McKay. With the captain's help, White believed, "Beef Cattle . . . could be driven out at the rate of three to four thousand per month."⁵⁴ The goal never was achieved, and actual deliveries were far from it.

McKay's motives for accepting the position of commissary agent can be gleaned only from his actions. The economic circumstances under which he began work, however, provide the context for subsequent events. In the summer of 1863, given

McKay apparently leased the *Scottish Chief*, which was owned by W. G. Ferris & Son of Tampa. Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, August 11, 1860; W. G. Ferris & Son to Alonzo B. Noyes, July 20, 1861, Misc. Letters to Alonzo B. Noyes, Alonzo B. Noyes Papers, PKY.

53. Grand Jury Presentment, Hillsborough County [Fall Term 1862?], Secretary of State, Correspondence, 1831-1917, folder 3, box 3, record group 150, series 24, FSA: "Minute Book 1852-1857," 191-92, and "Minute Book 1857-1864," 243, Hillsborough Lodge #25, Masonic Temple, Tampa; Return of election of October 6, 1862, Hillsborough County, Elections Returns, Territorial and Statehood Election Returns (1824-1870), box 9, record group 156, series 21, FSA; Hillsborough County, Circuit Court Minute Book [1854-1866], 708, Hillsborough County Courthouse.
54. Taylor, "Rebel Beef," 17-18; P. W. White to S. B. French, August 5, 1863, P. W. White Letterbook, July 15, 1863-April 12, 1864, 41, Pleasant Woodson White Papers, Florida Historical Society, University of South Florida, Tampa (hereinafter, White Papers).

defeats at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the future of the Confederacy and the worth of its currency appeared weak to many south Florida cattlemen. Few of them were strong supporters of secession; they were looking to their own future and saw it in the Havana cattle market. There, beeves could be exchanged for Spanish gold rather than for depreciating Confederate paper. Their interests, therefore, lay in protecting the herds from depletion until the Cuban trade could be resumed. Their link with that Cuban trade was McKay.

Under the circumstances, McKay only slowly organized cattle-supply operations, and his official correspondence recited a litany of excuses. He was hampered, he told his superiors, because of bad weather, lack of funds, a scarcity of cowhunters and drivers, and poor health. "I hardly feel Recovered fully from my up the country attack," he noted on August 27, 1863.⁵⁵ Anxious about the delays, White visited the area in September only to be confronted with his agent's demands that local men serving in the Army of Tennessee be detailed as cowhunters and drivers. Many of the men were relatives of McKay's associates, and the one of most concern to the agent was his son, James McKay, Jr. A Confederate official sent from Charleston, South Carolina, to inquire into the shipment delays reported on October 29: "Mr. McKay . . . did not commence operations until the 1st instant, and we have not, up to this time, received any cattle from that source."⁵⁶

White eventually arranged for the men requested by McKay, including the captain's son, to be detailed to south Florida. As gathering operations commenced in earnest, however, McKay centered his attentions on poor-quality herds located within proximity to the more-settled areas of his district, such as Hillsborough and Hernando counties. "[A]ll that has gone forward as yet has been from the poorest Ranges," he wrote to White on November 9, "it being impracticable to get to the best untill now."⁵⁷ The best and largest herds were ranged near the remote Kissimmee River, and they always lay just beyond McKay's reach. "I regret to say [that I] have received information," he informed White late in November, "that [my cowhunters] could not operate

55. McKay to A. B. Noyes, August 27, 1863, White Papers.

56. McKay to White, September 27, 1863, White Papers; C. McClenaghan to H. C. Guerin, October 29, 1863, in *OR*, series 1, XXVIII, part I, 459-62.

57. McKay to White, November 9, 1863, White Papers.

[at the Kissimmee] it being quite impracticable on account of water.⁵⁸ In December he noted that the river “is fast drying up and a few cattle can be obtained,” but in January 1864 he acknowledged his disappointing collections, “the Kissimi being still so high.”⁵⁹ Despite the poor collections, White nonetheless told Governor Milton in December 1863 that “[t]hree-fourths of the beef-cattle are now furnished from Manatee and Brevard Counties.” The agent continued: “What is to be the fate of our armies, now almost solely dependent upon this State for meat, Heaven only knows.”⁶⁰

White’s exasperation coincided with other disturbing reports from south Florida. Late in 1863, the Union army occupied positions below Tampa at Charlotte Harbor’s Useppa Island and at Fort Myers. Most of the soldiers involved were south Florida refugees, organized first as the Florida Rangers and then as the Second Florida Cavalry. Rumors also circulated that area cattlemen were in league with the refugees. A Florida account, picked up by southern newspapers in January 1864, noted, “It is also said that some have agreed to furnish large numbers of cattle to the enemy.”⁶¹ Six weeks later the *Charleston Daily Courier* stated more directly that “[south Florida deserters and traitors] are supplying the Yankees with cattle.”⁶²

If McKay was looking for an excuse to curtail cattle shipments, the presence of the small Union force at Fort Myers provided what he needed. At the beginning of the year he already had alerted White that “from the poor condition of the Cattle, as also the poor pasture on the way to be had, I have thought it wrong to continue operations.”⁶³ A month later he warned, “The Raids of the enemy on the sea board & into the interior has given me much uneasiness in Relation to future operations.”⁶⁴ After regular Confederate troops were withdrawn from south Florida— permanently as it turned out— to meet the Union movement that resulted in the Battle of Olustee, McKay convinced

58. *Ibid.*, November 20, 1863.

59. *Ibid.*, December 16, 1863, January 7, 1864.

60. White to John Milton, December 9, 1863, in *OR*, series 4, IV, 18.

61. Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, 157-60; Gainesville *Cotton States*, quoted in *Charleston [SC] Daily Courier*, January 30, 1864.

62. *Charleston [SC] Daily Courier*, March 10, 1864.

63. McKay to White, January 7, 1864, White Papers,

64. *Ibid.*, February 7, 1864.

White that the Union men “will soon hold the country between [the Caloosahatchee River] and Tampa.”⁶⁵

In fairness to McKay’s reputation as a Confederate, the military situation in south Florida had become extreme. The February 1864 repeal of draft exemptions for cattlemen prompted scores of area men to enlist at Fort Myers in the Second Florida Cavalry. Included among their number was James Dopson Green, perhaps the most influential political figure in the Peace River area where cattle-collection operations were centered. In March and in April, Green led assaults upon Fort Meade, the principal town in the interior. He and McKay were well known to each other, and Green and Summerlin had been associated for over a decade. When White visited McKay at Tampa in September 1863, Green had been present and had refused to eat with the Confederate official.⁶⁶

Repeal of the Confederate draft exemption for cattlemen posed an additional problem for McKay. While Union forces were growing, the remaining local men who previously had been exempt now were liable for Confederate service. Of course, regular troops also had been withdrawn from the region. In an attempt to solve the dilemma, McKay approached White with an idea. He began by asserting that “no Cattle may be expected from this District untill the enemy is got Rid off.”⁶⁷ He then proposed the creation of a special commissary service of local cattlemen and cowhunters. Eventually called the Cow Cavalry, the service offered local men a way out of the draft while ostensibly providing McKay with assistance and the area with defenders. Its largest company ultimately would be commanded by Francis A. Hendry. After some delay, White arranged for the proper authorizations, but not before he was compelled to report on April 12, “[McKay] has not been able to collect any cattle for the army this year.”⁶⁸

While the Cow Cavalry companies slowly organized, the Second Florida Cavalry grew bolder. In early May, Union army

65. White to L. B. Northrop, February 28, 1864, White Papers.

66. Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*. 92-93, 160-67; McKay to White, March 25, 1864, White Papers.

67. Robert A. Taylor, “Cow Cavalry: Munnerlyn’s Battalion in Florida, 1864-1865,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65 (October 1986), 197-98; McKay to White, March 25, 1864.

68. White to William G. Barth, April 12, 1864, White Papers; Brown, *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, 166-67.

officials were “tipped off” that McKay’s cowhunters had left Tampa for Fort Meade.⁶⁹ Union forces then descended upon the town and occupied it for two days. James McKay was in Gainesville, having left home several days earlier. When James McKay, Jr., heard about the attack, he rushed with his men back to Tampa but then sent in word that he would not attack for twenty-four hours. The Union men completed their search of the town and, subsequently, withdrew to Fort Myers. They then marched overland the ninety miles to Fort Meade, occupied the town, seized Confederate supplies and cattle, and burned the fort’s buildings. Again they withdrew without serious contest to Fort Myers.⁷⁰

The assaults upon Tampa and Fort Meade were disastrous for Confederate morale in south Florida. As an area man put it, “The times hear is vary squally . . . [and] there is only one hundred soldiers to compet with all the yanky raiders that may cum in our Country.”⁷¹ One squad of Confederate soldiers singled out Jacob Summerlin “for their special malediction” and drove the man and his family from their home. Cattle-supply operations were suspended for months, although by the fall—given problems that plagued Union forces—the Cow Cavalry units were able to re-establish an uneasy control over the ranges. By then, however, it was too late for the Confederacy.⁷²

McKay’s actions as commissary officer indicate, at the least, a willingness to turn a blind eye to the attempts of cattlemen to protect their herds; more likely, given his long-time personal and business associations, he was a full partner in the effort. Was he, however, more than that? Did he have another partner—the United States government? Confederate Major General Howell Cobb, for one, believed something was badly wrong in Florida. On March 7, 1865, he wrote Major General Sam Jones, then commanding in the state: “I have no doubt there has been considerable frauds perpetrated in the sale of beef cattle from

69. Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa Town 1824-1886: The Cracker Village With A Latin Accent* (Tampa, 1968), 70.

70. Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 167-69; McKay, “History of Tampa of the Olden Days.”

71. Unsigned letter dated “Polke County Bartow Postoffice June the 9 1864” in “Minutes of the Salem Church, Echopocksassa, Hillsborough County, Fla., Oct. 15, 1850-Nov. 15, 1851,” Polk County Historical and Genealogical Library, Bartow.

72. Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 169-70.

Florida." Cobb ordered an investigation, but apparently the war ended before the report could be completed.⁷⁵

In the absence of a "smoking gun" proving McKay's continuing ties with the Union war effort, the situation must be examined based upon circumstantial evidence. The tests commonly applied in such cases are opportunity and motive. McKay's appointment as commissary officer for south Florida certainly afforded opportunity to serve the United States by undermining cattle-supply operations. Were those operations undermined? Cattle shipments from Florida never met the needs or expectations of Confederate leaders, and the reasons given were questionable, at least to the extent that they provoked on-site visits by key officials of the supply system. The excuse of continued inaccessibility of the Kissimmee River area due to flooding particularly echoed ploys used both earlier and later to keep troublesome military men out of interior south Florida. In circumstances not too different from McKay's, the Seminole chief Alligator taunted General Thomas Sidney Jesup during the Second Seminole War by asserting that Jesup's men had captured only the poorest Indian cattle, the "cowhides." Alligator told the general: "Had you gone a little further, you would have gotten beef. The Indians have a great many cattle yet."⁷⁴

And, plenty of beef remained on the Florida ranges to be shipped to Cuba for \$17 to \$27 a head in gold. "Cattle are still abundant in [south] Florida," reported the Jacksonville *Florida Times* in October 1865, six months after the war's end.⁷⁵ Owners in Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties, who had reported for taxation a total of 106,130 head in 1861, reported 115,653 in 1866. When a Federal officer questioned Summerlin two months later about the size of his holdings, the cowman was at a loss for a specific answer. "[H]e told us he did not know how many cattle he had," reported Colonel George F. Thompson, "but supposed the number to be about 20,000." McKay, at the time, owned almost 2,000 head.⁷⁶

73. Howell Cobb to Sam Jones, March 7, 1865, Major General Sam Jones Papers, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.

74. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, April 19, 1867; *Army & Navy Chronicle*, March 7, 1839, 154.

75. Jacksonville *Florida Times*, quoted in Washington [DC] *Daily Morning Chronicle*, October 24, 1865.

76. The number of cattle reported for 1866 includes 12,621 head in Hillsborough County (220 of which belonged to McKay). The Hillsborough

Given that McKay's commissary position offered an opportunity for service to the United States, did he have the choice to communicate with Union forces after his return to Tampa in 1862? Again, the answer is yes. Union leaders at Key West and at Fort Myers often received intelligence from within south Florida Confederate lines. By late 1864, Unionists at Tampa even had mail delivery from the North through Key West. Personal relationships facilitated such communication. McKay's friend, Union Captain James D. Green, also was a longtime associate of Summerlin. When United States forces occupied Tampa in May 1864, Summerlin's stepson, Aaron Gideon Zipprer, was sent by James McKay, Jr., to negotiate with Green and other Union officers. Green subsequently was permitted to pass through McKay's picket lines to return overland to Fort Myers with several captured horses. When Green's men assaulted and burned Fort Meade, some Confederates vented their wrath on Summerlin. Opportunities for communication thus existed, and events suggest that contemporaries of McKay, Summerlin, and Green believed they in fact were communicating. Perhaps these relationships were on the mind of former United States Senator David Levy Yulee's son when, during a business dispute with McKay in 1868, he wrote his father: "It is always well to know who one's opponents are, especially when we know what strengths they could bring into the contest & I presume you know all about [McKay]."⁷⁷

McKay's opportunities thus were abundant. What then of his motives? The captain asserted to United States officials in 1862 that he was a Unionist, but the self-serving nature of the declaration and the lack of substantiation call his true beliefs into question. Whatever his sympathies in the war, McKay's motives likely were far simpler; his actions were predicated upon economic and other personal rewards. That he had clout with

County total is taken from the 1867 tax list because the list for 1866 is not available. Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties, tax lists, 1861; Manatee and Polk counties, tax lists, 1866; Hillsborough County, tax list, 1867 (available on microfilm at FSA); "Journal of George F. Thompson," 80.

77. Henry A. Crane to H. W. Bowers, March 16, May 27, 1864, Letters Received, Department and District of Key West, 1861-68, record group 393, NA (available on microfilm at PKY); Pizzo, *Tampa Town*, 70; Catherine S. Hart to "dear Mother, Sisters & Brothers," January 5, 1865, Ossian B. and Catherine S. Hart Papers, Dena E. Snodgrass Collection, PKY; McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days"; C. W. Yulee to David Levy Yulee, April 23, 1868, box 41, David L. Yulee Papers, PKY.

Union occupying forces was evident almost as soon as peace was declared. When, for example, during the summer of 1865 James McKay, Jr., was sought by Union authorities for an attempted lynching, McKay, Sr., quickly arranged for his protection. "I received notice from my father," the son recalled, "to report to the commanding officer in the garrison before stopping anywhere, which I did and was given a paper stating that I was not to be molested only on orders from Washington."⁷⁸

McKay's economic rewards were forthcoming almost as quickly as James McKay, Jr.'s protection. When in the summer of 1865 many of the captain's Tampa associates applied for presidential pardons, including Summerlin, Post, Thomas, Hooker, and Taylor, the former commissary officer apparently did not feel the need. Instead—likely after a trip to Tallahassee and a visit with newly appointed provisional Governor William Marvin and Major General John G. Foster (then commanding the Department of Florida)—McKay left the state for New York. His son later explained: "My father succeeded in getting to Havana by a fishing smack and from his friends in Cuba got sufficient funds to take him to New York, landing there with only a few dollars in his pocket. Meeting the old merchants he dealt with previous to the war, they assisted him in buying the Steamer Honduras, which he named the Governor Marvin, costing \$72,000. He also bought a stock of goods valued at \$24,000."⁷⁹ Not too clearly expressed in the younger McKay's account were the identities of the "old merchants" who proved so generous to his father or the fact that the Honduras had been the Union headquarters ship during the May 1864 assault upon Tampa. He also failed to mention that his father received a United States government contract to bring 150 men south to work at Fort Taylor.⁸⁰

The government's reliance upon Captain McKay did not end with his voyage from New York to Florida. Before his arrival

78. McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days"; John Wilder Pocket Diary, 1865, entry of August 21, folder 52, box 31, Loomis-Wilder Papers, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.

79. Pardon files; J. G. Foster to Asst. Adjt. General, Military Div. of the Gulf, August 31, 1865, Letters Sent by the Department of Florida and Successor Commands, April 18, 1861-January 1869, Vol. 6 (6 DFla.), August 31, 1865-July 30, 1867, M-1096, roll 2, NA; McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days."

80. *ORN*, series 1, XVII, 693; Jacksonville *Florida Union*, November 11, 1865.

back in Key West, half a company of Union troops was ordered stationed at his and Summerlin's Peace River wharf, and McKay transported them there in his new steamer. The troops were without orders, other than—presumably—to protect the cattle-shipping operation. In April 1866, General Foster chartered the *Governor Marvin* at a "reasonable rate," partly because McKay was known to him as "a fair and liberal man."⁸¹ Soon, the captain was running government errands from New Orleans to St. Marks, Tampa, Key West, and the Tortugas.⁸²

The government largess continued after 1866. When McKay needed an additional steamer for the cattle trade, he purchased the *Southern Star*, another Union gunboat used in the assault on Tampa. When in 1868, attempts were made to cancel his army contract, no less a luminary than George G. Meade, then commanding the Third Military District, interceded on McKay's behalf for "the public exigencies and convenience."⁸³ Despite Cuban actions that limited the cattle trade and widespread economic dislocation in Florida, the McKays prospered. As one Tampan related: "The McKays then held full swing in all this part of the country. It seemed as if they owned and controlled everything. They had plenty of money, and money is here, like everywhere else, king."⁸⁴

James McKay's postwar prosperity was built upon the generosity of the United States. Early in the war he had pledged his allegiance to the United States and his cooperation with the Union military. Available evidence suggests that he honored his commitment to President Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward and that, from 1862, he served in south Florida as an agent of the United States government.

81. Tallahassee *Semi-Weekly Floridian*, November 3, 1865; Joseph Shaw to [?], January 1, 1866, Joseph C. Shaw Papers, FSA; Peter Harper to E. C. Woodruff, February 12, 1866, Department and District of Florida, 1865-69, Letters Received, 1865-1866 A-D, box 1, record group 393, NA; John G. Foster to George L. Hartsuff, April 11, 1866, M-1096, roll 2, NA.

82. James McKay [Jr.] to "My dear Father" in Gordon, "Missions of Tampa," 64-65.

83. McKay, "History of Tampa of the Olden Days"; George G. Meade to E. W. Stanton, April 17, 1868, Third Military District, Outgoing Correspondence and Telegrams, January 1868-March 1869, vol. 2, 139-40, George Gordon Meade Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

84. Jacksonville *Florida Daily Times*, February 15, 1882.