

1929

Letter of Marcus C. Stephens (Quincy, Florida, 1835)

Marcus Cicero Stephens



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Recommended Citation

Stephens, Marcus Cicero (1929) "Letter of Marcus C. Stephens (Quincy, Florida, 1835)," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 8 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol8/iss2/6>

LETTER OF MARCUS CICERO STEPHENS

Rosanna near Quincy, Oct. 13th, 1835.

My Dear Sarah ;

I wrote to Ellis last week, and enclosed 20\$ for your mother, supposing she might need it about the time of removal, to purchase various articles much wanted in this country, cheap in Newbern, but dear in Florida, and I also know, that if she dont use it, it will not be wasted,-Under the same conviction I enclose you my dear Child \$5, with which your mother will procure such little things as a girl of your age most needs and which she understands better than I can direct. - I do not wish to excite any jealousy in the other girls Julia and Louisa for you are all equally dear to me. But you are now first coming into life, and I want you to be a little smartish, coming into a new country.

I desire to hear from you previous to your taking shipping from Newbern for this place, you will therefore as soon as it is decided how you come,-in what vessel, who commander,-when you set off,-to what port bound, St Marks or Apalachicola Bay,-write either you or some of the family. My reason is, that I may apprise the master of the Hotel at Tallahassee who will aid me all in his power in procuring Hacks to bring you up from the Fort-St Marks as far at least as Tallahassee from whence it will be easy to get home. Also I wish to Know how to time my Waggon and team to be at St Marks with cotton to take return freight of our Household stuff: up to my house. Also I wish to Know if the Cart wrote for in Ellis' letter is on board, and if Godfrey's Sulky be, as I must send Horse and mule to bring them up and thus save land

freight not only of the Cart and Sulky but of such things as the cart can bring.

I have this day bought 2 Mules, 2 belonged to the plantation before and I own 2 Horses so that I can command a team of mules and two extra horses which can be put to my carriage, or sent down to St Marks to bring up the cart and sulky provided there be Harnesses attached to those vehicles. The mails are exceedingly uncertain, We get neither paper nor letter and of course we can Know nothing whatever of your movements in Newbern, I am very certain that there are letters for us on the route, but in all probability they are taking a circuit thro' New Orleans or elsewhere. In my memorandum to Ellis of seeds and garden Stuff I omitted to mention Shallots also Leaks, pot Majoram, and Thyme. I wish you would attend to those matters, in regard to the Shallots, the kind I have in my garden in Newbern are the St Domingo Shallot the best in the world, bring roots and Seeds. The letter to Ellis speaks fully I believe as to the other seeds but I may have forgotten some things. You and your mother will recollect, what is omitted.

Betsy wishes you to ask Sam Barron if he ever spoke to Mr. Croom about the land. I am this day hauling bricks for my Chimneys, and shall have about 5,000 tonight, another Kiln will be set up in about a Week of which I am to have the first so I am not without hope of having a pretty comfortable home for you all by the time you arive, at least a Sleeping and eating place if its unfinished state prevents my dwelling from having a more dignified name. When I get you all out I am certain we shall all be happier than at present separated as we are by so long a distance and for so tedious a period. Many things I have in contemplation but must defer saying or doing until your mother and all join me, One thing my dear Sarah, I can with truth say, - I never felt so independent in

all my life before, I flatter myself that I shall be able in this country to afford with ease many little indulgences to my children, which I could not in Newbern. A good house over us and abundant means of comfortable support. All this, it is true, depends on industry and attention, but my children are not indolent and your mother you well know is never idle. So then come with good heart and don't be cast down, -the Sun shines as bright here as in Newbern.

I was over the Cotton fields this afternoon, they look promising. Betsy and Rosanna were so tempted that on my promise to give them a cent a pound for all they could pick, at it they went and are now picking while I write, -The field looks like a sheet, but the weather is cool, -We have had three smart frosts. The Sugar Cane is now getting prime, by the time you get here, it will be first rate for eating

The people in this country have been very kind to Betsy and myself, among Betsy's kindest is a Mrs Gibson, a loud talking slap bangish kind of a Mrs A. Partens sort of a woman but by far a better manager, -I think your Mother will like her. I have found several kind folks at a time when I needed them among whom is an old Batcheler, a Scotchman who is sterling as to goodness- of heart and integrity.

I am asked every day when I look for you all, and the folks seem to be as anxious for your arrival as if of kin.

Every thing in this country is far dearer than in Newbern, especially those articles which are most wanting in families both food & clothing, for instance I have been obliged to give \$11 per barrel for indifferent flour, 15 cents per pound for Lard, 25c for Butter which indeed is always the price of this last article. Pork \$16 to \$18 per Barrel, Bacon 13 1/2 to 15 cents per lb. and very inferior to the: Bacon in No. Caro. It will be a treat to me to get hold of a good home saved

Bacon ham. Beef is cheap*****7 to 12 dollars is the price of a good sized steer***** (Pages torn for a couple of lines) I have bought a steer for \$12 one of the best Kind, this steer I mean to put in the pea lots as soon as ready where he will fatten until after Christmas when he will be in prime order and afford us some good corned beef. Dry goods are also very high, but domestics are far more reasonable than when I first came to Florida, still they are full high ; I have written thus particular so that your Mother may regulate her purchases. And be sure and tell her not to cramp herself so as to be entirely bare of cash on leaving Newbern, but at the same time say to her that I have money in reserve ready to meet exigencies on her reaching St Marks. Under the belief that your grandmother will come on, I shall push the finishing of her room as fast as possible. I am persuaded the climate of this country will agree with her for there are some hearty aged people here especially among the women

Your Affectd father,

M. C. STEPHENS

(Note on back of letter)

Tell Sam Barron from me that I have never needed his services more than at this time. The death of his brother has produced this need, for the affairs of Godfrey were never settled all entirely, owing to the negligent and careless way he managed his accts. Many claims I make no doubt will be brought forward unjustly and he and I must do our best to save all we can for the Children,-and as I am no lawyer, I must look to him.

Note-The writer of the above letter was Marcus Cicero Stephens of Newbern, North Carolina. During the early years of territorial Florida, many settlers came to the region from the Carolinas and Virginia, due, partly, to the desire to establish pioneer plantations as speculative ventures and, partly, to the need of expansion to take care of the surplus

slave property. Stephens was apparently a member of this group. His family was well connected, as his mother was the niece of Commodore James Barron of the "Chesapeake" fame. The plantation which was being established was located near Quincy, Florida; and here the group, consisting of father, mother, and eight children, took its part in the development of the new state. One of the sons, Samuel Barron Stephens, was a lieutenant of a Florida company during the War for Southern Independence and fought at the Battle of the Old Men at Natural Bridge. The original letter is in the possession of Mrs. Caroline Stephens Scott of Tallahassee, to whom acknowledgment is made. To Dr. Kathryn T. Abbey, of Florida State College for Women, is due the suggestion of its publication, its transcribing, and this note.