

2-9-1886

**Letter from E. A. Lee to Mrs. William J. Clark, St. Nicholas, Fla.,
1886-02-09**

E. A. Lee

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St Nicholas, Fla., Feb 9th 1886

Mrs. Will. J. Clark

My Dear Friend.

I received yours of Feb 3rd last night. I cannot tell you how welcome it was, how glad I was to receive it & to know that widely separated as we were, I was yet held in kindly remembrance. — I have been intending to write to you for some time past, but there are so many things to see & enjoy, that I have delayed it longer than I thought to do, it is astonishing how very busy one can be, doing nothing, but simply enjoying themselves. As I said, I was glad to hear from you, so glad that this morning, with unwonted promptitude, I have seated myself, pen in hand, to indite an answer. I do not know how long I shall write, or how soon the brilliant sunshine may tempt me out to bathe in its brightness & warmth, but I shall at least make a beginning, & the first few lines of a letter are all I dread, those once written, my pen goes meandering along to an interminable length, that sometimes I fear, wearies my unlucky correspondants.

Among friends, I do not like short letters, & am never guilty of writing them —

RMU 8-08

I did not enjoy my journey hither very much. I found it a very long, weary & tiresome one, & was glad enough to have it over. We reached Jacksonville at one o'clock A. M., instead of one in the afternoon, twelve hours behind time. I found our friends waiting for us late as it was, with a boat, & were rowed in the bright moonlight over the St John's river to "Sterling Villa", our home for the winter.

Florida greeted us in the most disagreeable & forbidding manner to my great astonishment & I might almost say, indignation, it was so different from the feast I had been invited to partake.

The first day of our arrival, it seemed so cold, so uncomfortable, the river was rough, the wind was very high, penetrating through cracks & crevices & door & window of a house not built with any reference to any such high handed proceedings, but for the mild temperature of an average Florida winter, this mild temperature is not however, even in an ordinary season, continuous & uninterrupted, but is varied by intervals of cool weather, but of very short duration. But at the time of which I write, it continued day after day, till on the 12th of Jan, the mercury went down to 17°, the

ground was frozen, ice formed on the edge of the river, extending quite a distance from the bank. & worst of all, the oranges froze solid on the trees. The cold was not intense, we think nothing of 17° below freezing, but I suffered more than I should with the mercury 17° below zero, in our tight, close, well heated rooms at home. How I shivered, the high, piercing winds penetrated the house like a breath of ice, the parlor or library in which I sat were heated, the one by a fireplace, the other by an open stove, & all the heat seemed to rush up the chimney, instead of warming the room. — Well all that is passed now, we have occasional intervals of decided coolness of temperature, accompanied by high winds that literally roar through the tall tree tops, but I think we may safely expect for the future, sunshine & warmth the latter constantly increasing, as the season advances.

This has been an exceptional winter, an unheard of state of things, that venerable being, "the oldest inhabitant" says, the like was never known before, & the people who have lived here for years, were as much astonished by this long continued "cold wave," as were the hordes of northerners who had rushed down here to enjoy the sunshine & the warmth & the balmy air, which Florida

claims as her natural inheritance, & of which they had heard so much.

St Nicholas is situated on the east side of the ~~St Johns~~ river, there is a high bluff which is bordered by a continuous grove of towering water oaks, (an evergreen tree, with very dense foliage), pine trees are occasionally interspersed among them, a little beyond this grove are the several dwellings, in pleasant proximity, each with its orange grove around it - My brother has a pleasant, roomy house, with a broad two storied veranda, running round three sides of it - it must be a delightful house in summer - The parlor is a very pleasant room with a large bay window, & is filled with beautiful things, not fine furniture, but souvenirs of travel from many lands, not only beautiful in themselves, but to them, rich with associations of their many wanderings. I never saw so many things I was almost tempted to covet, in one room before, especially a set of views of sunny Italy in water color, such lovely sunset scenes - I would have some like them, were they procurable, but brother thinks they could not be found in this country.

Jacksonville is on the western side of the river, so of course it rolls its broad expanse of water, between us & that place, which necessitates the use of a boat whenever we wish to go there, which is somewhat inconvenient sometimes, but the crossing is often a very pleasant bit of experience. There is a ferryboat but it is about two miles away, so rather beyond our reach, there is also a small steamer, the "Flora" which makes two trips a day each way, which sometimes is a great convenience. All the families on the bluff, own at least a row boat, & ^{each} has a long pier extending out into the river, also a boat house - Brother has a rowboat on which a sail can be used when desired, since we came, he has finished a sail boat capable of holding some three tons, to bring wood, lumber, or supplies of any sort. I do not fancy a sail boat, it would be delightful if you could only contrive to manufacture wind to order, but when it is against you, or dies away & leaves you

be calmed in the middle of the great river, to put it mildly, it is not pleasant.

The river itself merits the title so often conferred upon it, the beautiful St Johns, the most beautiful, I ever looked upon, I should soon grow to love it, were my home upon its banks. I sometimes find myself wishing my pleasant house stood overlooking its broad waters, for I do like Florida, as a winter home. The river (opposite our house) is about $\frac{5}{8}$ of a mile wide, & the depth I am told 50 or 60 ft - The opposite shore is low, not half as pleasant as our side with its high bluff. In going to the city we have to cross the river diagonally, so that the distance is $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Jacksonville is not a particularly pleasant city, to my mind, but apparently quite flourishing, thanks to the thousands of northerners who congregate there every winter. Its many enormous hotels form quite a feature of the place. The streets are of the loose white sand common to the country, I think there is not a paved street in the city. Its main street is anything but imposing, stores of all sizes & descriptions all mingled indiscriminately together. I went over one day to look for curiosities - found them in many stores, & in

great variety, in fact I saw so many beautiful things it almost drove me wild, I wanted so many of them, but how could I get them home in my overcrowded trunk, was a question that very sensibly suggested itself & somewhat cooled my enthusiasm. I did buy a few things & (knowing my weakness) presume I shall add to their number. I saw some of the loveliest painted shells, the scenes depicted were so beautiful & the painting so exquisite in execution, I asked the price, from \$4.00 to \$14.00 was the startling answer.

When I first came here I found great enjoyment in not only eating oranges, but also in looking at them. An orange tree in bearing is a beautiful sight, with its glossy, evergreen leaves, dotted thickly with the golden fruit. I used to just sit at my window & look down upon them, by the half hour, they formed a beautiful picture, now how different is the picture that presents itself, oranges all gone, the rich, thick foliage clinging to the boughs all dry & brown, or lying on the ground, under the leafless trees. The frozen oranges last quite a while if carefully thawed, about as good as at their best, but after a time grow soft & become

uneatable - such quantities on quantities of them
as I have consumed, & how I have enjoyed
them, but alas! the long delicious feast is about
over, to my great regret.

The weather of late has been delightful
I cannot realize that it is really February,
& that up north, you are having cold & ice
& snow. I feel sometimes as if I had gone to
sleep in winter & had just waked up about
the first of June, I have had doors & windows
open all day. (There is a peach tree (a Chinese
variety) that has been in blossom for the last
two weeks, and the yellow jasmine is beginning
to bloom, I have a single flower in water
& it scents the whole room. Soon the mocking
birds will fill the air with their delightful
music. Florida though disappointing me at
first, is coming to be all I expected or hoped to
find it. — Lily is having I think
a very enjoyable time, she is certainly a success
among the young people, & much sought after
by some of the best of them. There is a party of
them down stairs now in the parlor & a merry
time they are having, judging from the voices
& the laughter. — You cannot think how

rapidly the time is flying away, I am having such a good time, that I dread the period of home going, though perhaps when spring comes I may get a bit homesick, I hope so.

I thank Mr Clark for writing to Mr Harris, hearing nothing from Mr C, I wrote again to the latter myself, for I felt anxious that the matter should be attended to.

Kiss Ethel for me & tell her Mrs Lee sent it all the way from Florida to her in a letter. Give my kind regards to your husband & all enquiring friends if there are any.

Aunt King said she would like to hear from me, please tell her I am well as usual, & am having a grand good time "down south", that I like it ever so much, I hope she & her husband are well & enjoying their new home.

I am not sure but that I ought to beg your pardon for sending you such a long letter, but know you will excuse it, I wanted, as the children say, "to tell you all about every thing" I have only room to say, much love, good bye

Letter from
Mrs. Lee to mother



Mrs William J. Clark

Ypsilanti

Mich

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