

Samuel L. Southard to Andrew Jackson, February 9, 1827, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

SECRETARY SOUTHARD TO JACKSON.

Washington, February 9, 1827.

Sir. Your unsealed letter of the 5th Jany was handed to me, in my Office, on the 3rd of this month, by Genl. Houston, with the remark, that he had received it as an enclosure from you, on the preceding day. Disposed to regard it *only* as an enquiry, dictated by the persuasion, that you have been injured, and feeling that I have done you no intentional wrong, I cheerfully give such explanation as is in my power.

About the first of July last, I was at the private table of my friend John S. Wellford, in Fredericksburg, in company with five or six of his immediate neighbors, who, I beleive, had been invited to spend an hour or two with me after the cloth was removed. There was much conversation on a variety of subjects, occasionally, political. That part of it which related to Mr. Monroe and yourself, was probably the foundation of the tale which has been borne to you. You will perceive, from the time and place, that it was, in no aspect, official. I do not profess to have a very distinct recollection of every part of it—particularly of the language used. No effort was made to retain it in my memory because I was not aware of the presence of any one who would seize such a time and occasion to treasure it up, for future use. I can rely on memory however, for the substance of what was said.

I cannot recollect that I asked Dr Wallace upon “what ground he supported the election of General Jackson to the Presidency”—The question would have been superfluous, as the Doctor's habit of talking upon that subject, has rendered the enquiry unnecessary, for

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anyone who has fallen in with him, at least, since his visit to Washington during the winter before last. I am also satisfied that he did not then, or at any time, state “other reasons”, besides “your services during the late war”, as I feel very sure, that he has never, in my presence, given any other than one reason for his choice—The battle of New Orleans.

I have no hesitation in denying to you the statements of my remarks, as they are presented in your letter—And assuring you, that I have never charged you with neglect or desertion of your military duties—nor denied to you the merit and glory of fighting the battle of new Orleans. But as a conversation relating to that subject did occur, at the private table of Mr. Wellford, and as it may have been misunderstood, and has certainly been misrepresented, I think proper to give you my recollection of it, and feel the more confidence in my correctness because I then intended to express what I have frequently expressed elsewhere, and what I have always believed to be in conformity with the truth of history.

The conversation was, on this point, commenced and principally sustained by others. In its progress some one, probably Dr. Wallace, remarked that the battle of N. Orleans was proof that Genl Jackson was fit for any station. Some other answered, that fighting no one battle could be proof of fitness for high Civil stations. The reply was, that it was not the fighting of the battle alone but also providing the materials and preparing the means for it—that this had been left to his unaided exertions—the War Department having neglected to make the preparations and left him without arms means or money. I think I had not before this, taken part in the Conversation, but considering this view of the subject as extremely unjust to Mr. Monroe who had been Secretary of War at the time, to whom I have long professed a strong personal attachment, and for whose virtues I felt reverence, as I did gratitude for his services to the Country, I thought it my duty to say in substance that my impression of what had occurred, at that period, was different, that I did not think Genl J. had been left in the manner represented, that all which could be done, had been done, after Mr Monroe came into the Department, that his exertion and devotion to his duties at that time, had nearly destroyed his life, that he early discovered or foresaw that N. Orleans would be attacked, and informed Genl Jackson of it, and provided such

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troops and arms as he could to meet the emergency, that he had learned that Genl J,s health was bad, and he and the President were extremely anxious, lest this cause should induce him to return to Tennessee, or he should remain so long in Florida as to prevent him from reaching N Orleans in time to prepare for its defence, that urgent and pressing letters were sent to hasten him to that point, And that I beleived the means provided, the information given and the orders sent, enabled Genl. Jackson to fight the battle and to fight it successfully, that without Mr. Monroe's exertions it could not probably have been won, as it was won. But I did not deny to you the merit of fighting the battle well; or making every possible exertion to prepare for it, nor fail to give you the high praise which was your due. My object was to vindicate Mr. Monroe, and was not then, nor has it been, at any time, to depreciate your military exploits. They form a part of our national glory which I have no inclination to tarnish.

It is not improbable, that Colo. Gray did ask where the letters or orders which I mentioned, were to be found, and that I did answer that I could not tell except it might be in the War Dept., but that I understood, and had no doubt, that they did exist.

You will not, after this narrative, expect me to give the name of any informer. My information, whether correct or otherwise, was derived from the various sources, verbal, written and printed, from which my knowledge of the history of that day is drawn. As you request, I shall inclose this letter to Genl Houston that he may forward it.

I am Sir respectfully etc