Selma Ala. 8. Feb 1862

Hon. C. J. McRae

Dear Sir

Since my letter of the 8th inst. I have had an interview with Mr W. P. Brown, to ascertain the best terms he would undertake to furnish coal here for the Government in case of the establishment of a ferry. I have also made application to the Alabama Coal Mining Co, and will inform you of the result so soon as ascertained. Mr Brown says they were loosing money at the old prices, and that he could not afford to deliver coal here at less than $6.50 per ton, and will undertake to supply the Government at that price. I told him of the impression prevailing at Richmond, that the coal dealers here were disposed to take advantage of the necessities of the Government to exact exhorbitant prices. He says this is unjust. That he has not advanced his prices a particle on the Government, and that owing to the cost of transpossing coal from the cars to the barges, and transporting it thence to Mobile, he could not afford to duplicate his recent

sale at $11.50, in Mobile, to the government, and would not under existing circumstances contract to deliver it there at that price. He estimates the cost (including waste of coal) of transferring it from the cars to the barges, and the hire and towing of the barges as now charged by the boats, at Six dollars or upwards per ton. It must be quite expensive, as well as very troublesome to transfer coal from the cars to the barges, under present arrangements. Mr Brown is I believe now on his way to Richmond, and will probably be there by the time this reaches you. He seems anxious to convince the government that he has no intention to extort.

A good deal of excitement exists here at this time in consequence of the accounts from the seats of war, rec'd yesterday and to day; the advance of the enemy in Tennessee, the surrender of fort Henry, and the advance of the Burnside fleet, with the intention (as announced to day in a dispatch from the Governor) of attacking Pensacola and Mobile. The war spirit is up, and if a supply of suitable arms was at hand, there would upon a call by the Governor, be a rush to

the points threatened. But it would be folly or madness for men without arms, to rush to meet a foe thoroughly armed and equipped. The telegraphic despatches to day also state that the great Ericson battery is nearly complete, that the federal Congress or House, has passed a bill authorizing the construction of twenty iron clad frigates; and that the Philadelphians are actively engaged about a naval expedition for the South. And this in addition to the vast preparations heretofore made. And what have we done, what are we doing, to meet the tremendous onslaughts about to be made upon us on every side, and at all points? Are we ready? I would feel happier than I do, if I had the assurance that we are ready. The people have been keyed up with the hope, unduly excited by unreflecting newspapers, and flippant sensation despatches, that England and France, one or both, would soon come to the rescue, and under this idea probably the price of cotton advanced to 8 cents or upwards. And there is an impression that the Government itself has been more or less influenced by the same idea. Economy is a good thing, but is

that a wise economy which would weigh the safety and independence of the country against a few thousand, or million of dollars more or less? We are without a navy, but might, or ought we not have gun boats of sufficient strength and numbers to meet and cope with those of the enemy in our harbors and on our rivers? and if possible, arms to put in the hands of the brave thousands in all parts of the confederacy who are panting for the opportunity of going to the rescue?

Things are looking squally, and though unterrified, I assure you I do not feel altogether easy. Hope you, who have better means of information, have reason to feel better.

Very truly & Respectfully yours

J. W. Lapsley

P. S. If I get a more favorable offer for coal from the Alabama Company, will inform you by telegraph.

J. W. Lapsley
Feb 8th

These are all men of means, and would make a strong company.

P. S. The proposed iron company is composed of Judge McLanahan (a very substancial and respectable man) of Shelby County: Wm. M. Byrd - lawyer, A. T. Jones (Hardware merchant) James W. Lapsley, and myself of this place; John White, Thos I. Portis, lawyers, Cahawba; John R. Kenan L. I. Hale, Shelby, and H. Ware, the present owner of the property. Mr I. R. Kenan, who at present has charge of the business of the Shelby Lime Company, a large establishment, and who is regarded as one of the best managers of business in the Country, has been selected as superintendent, and his acceptance is made a sine qua non, by some of the Company. He will probably accept. There are about 6000 acres of land - greater part well timbered, and including 120 acres coal land, attached to the property. The ore bank is as well located as could well be desired, and ore very abundant - indeed, inexhaustable, and very accessable, and rich, and of best quality. The developement of this mine would be of great value to the Country in peace, while, situated as the Country

and government are, it would be difficult to overestimate its importance at this juncture. Considerations of this kind constitute one of the inducements, and not a small one, which actuate me to try and get up this company, and I have labored for it not a little. And if I could effect my purposes I would probably be doing the government and country far greater service, than I could by raising and equiping and sending to the field, a redgement, perhaps I might say, half a dozen regements, of first rate troops. But without patronage of some sort from the government, as indicated in my letter of the 6th, the probability is my efforts will be unavailing, and that the enterprize will be abandoned, for reasons heretofore stated. I hope you will advise me as soon as possible, of the determination in relation to the foundary and, the probable quantity of iron that will be taken by the government in the course of two years under contract. I hope you will be able to say enough by telegraph to enable me to satisfy my associates. J. M. L.