Selma Ala. 17 Feb 1862

Hon C. J. McRae

Dear Sir;

I have rec'd your dispatch of this date, informing me of the passage of a bill loaning $150,000 to the Ala & Miss. rivers R. R. Co; and will advise the president Dr Griffin, as you request. I apprehend some difficulty now in procuring iron to complete the road, but in view of recent events, its early completion is now of such vital importance to the country and government, that if need be, the government ought not to hesitate to appropriate the necessary iron, wherever it can be taken without serious public detriment, and if necessary, take it from unimportant local roads. There was a lot of iron about sufficient for the purpose, which could have been had some weeks ago, and which may yet be undisposed of. I will immediately write and try to secure it.

The specimens of iron from Ware's works, you requested, have been sent on by express, and I hope will reach you. The box containing them is directed to you. Though it may not be regarded as of much importance, I enclose for what they may be considered worth, copies of several certificates

of intelligent and practical judges, in relation to this iron. To these, others of similar character might be added. These certificates seem to be borne out by the testimony of all judges who are acquainted with this iron; and if it ~~might~~ is not suitable for the purposes of government in making arms, and for all other uses of the government, suitable iron will in vain I believe, be sought for in the Confederacy. What I have been apprehending, seems likely to take place, that is, the disbanding of the Company which I had at no little trouble, succeeded in getting together with the view of purchasing Wase's works, and excluding the manufacture of iron. One of the gentlemen whom I was most anxious to retain, informed me to day, that he would withdraw; and his example may, and I apprehend will, be followed by some others; and I think I can now say positively, that nothing short of a large and liberal contract by the government to extend to a period of at least two years, will secure the formation of the Company. Men of property and means are generally very cautious about embarking into untried enterprizes, especially in times like the present; and recent untoward events in the affairs

of the country, have tended to increase this feeling not a little. If necessary, can I rely on you to help me in this business? I regard it as a public necessity that the iron capacity of this country should be speedily developed.

Our people have been greatly excited for the last week or ten days; and to day, something like a feeling of consternation seized the public in consequence of the receipt of a telegraphic dispatch, stating that Fort Donalson, and thirteen thousand of our troops had been captured, and that Nashville had surrendered. By most, the statement seemed to be regarded as incredible, but it was and is generally regarded as probably at least betokening something very disastrous. The telegraph office has been besieged by a most anxious and excited crowd, to get something confirmatory or contradictory of the statement; and only dispersed when informed by the operator that the lines were down, and no further intelligence could be expected for the present. There has I believe, never before been such anxiety felt and manifested in this section. A large number of people from the country were in town, and went home greatly depressed. The people are in fact much alarmed, and I assure you I find it im-

possible, under the supposition that the statement referred to, may possibly be true, to divest myself of that feeling. Even if we have lost Nashville, the people would rush by thousands and tens of thousands to recover it, if they had arms and ammunition. But what can be done without these? If we could not defend this vitally important point with our best generals, after months of preparation, what chance is there to recover it, and arrest the victorious march of the exultant foe, after the loss of so many brave men, and such quantity of precious arms and munitions? To me, if the statement prove true, the prospect looks really terrific. What assurance and consolation can you offer? If time were allowed to call into action the resources of the country, I think I could see our way out of the difficulty; but as things are, if we have sustained the disasters apprehended, I really cannot see through. I hope you will call and see us on your way homeward — presuming that you will be returning soon. Telegraph me when you are about leaving, so that I may be on the look out for you, and not be out of the way.

Very truly yours

J. W. Lapsley

P. S. I address this alternately to Mr Curry, as possibly you may cease before its arrival. In that case the wise please get and open the box of specimens of iron