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Notes furnished me by Judge Hopkins at my earnest request, relating to his civil & political services in this State

A. J. Pickett

Mobile
April 12th 1847

Dear Sir

I received yesterday your favor of the 8th instant. My engagements in the circuit court of the U. States which is now in session will prevent me from complying with your request before some time next week. I expect to be able to furnish you with the information you desire in relation to the life & character of the late John H. Walker. For the early incidents in the Northern part of this State I refer you to Dr. Thomas Fearn of Huntsville. He settled in that town in 1811 is very intelligent & better acquainted with the early history of that part of the country than any other person whom I know. I wish you success in your undertaking.

Very Respectfully
Yr Obt Servt
A. F. Hopkins

A. J. Pickett Esq.

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A. J. Pickett Esq.
Montgomery
Alabama

Hon A. F. Hopkins
of
Mobile –

Mobile
April 17th 1847.

Dear Sir

I do not think I shall be guilty of egotism in communicating the facts in relation to myself of which you sought information of me in your letter of the 8th instant.

I am a native of Virginia was born near Danville in that State. In pursuit of an education I studied in an Academy at New London Virginia another at Caswell Court house North Carolina & in the University of the last mentioned State.

I studied law in the office of the Hon: William Leigh of Halifax County Virginia. He is an able jurist the only brother of Benjamin Watkins Leigh of the same State & one of the present Judges of the General Court of Virginia.

In December 1816 & at the age of twenty two years I settled in Huntsville in this State. It was then within the limits of the Mississippi Territory. Fourteen or fifteen months afterwards the Government of the Alabama Territory was established & extended over the country which now forms the territory of the State of Alabama.

I owned a plantation near Huntsville and the price of cotton being then very high

the practice of law in the Valley of the Tennessee river worth but little I relinquished in the spring of 1818 my business at the Bar. I sold my plantation shortly after & in January 1819 moved to the county of Lawrence in this State & settled upon lands I had previously purchased of the U. States.

In the month of May 1819 I was elected one of the representatives of Lawrence county in the Convention by which during the summer afterwards the Constitution of the State of Alabama was formed. I sat as a member of that body.

In September of that year I was induced by a great decline in the price of cotton to resume the practice of law.

In August 1822 I was elected by the county of Lawrence her Senator in the General Assembly of the State. At that time the people of Alabama were not divided upon questions of National politics. There were State parties & I acted with that which elected the late William Bibb Governor of Alabama & subsequently supported the late Dr. Henry Chambers for the same office.

During my service in the Senate of the State the measure was adopted which has inflicted more injury upon ~~the~~ her best interests, ~~of the State~~ than any other act that the Legislature has ever passed. The system of State Banks was then established. Of twenty one Senators seven were opposed to the system & six members only of the House of Representatives. At the head of the latter was the late James

Jackson of Lauderdale County. He was a rich planter & had great mental capacity. I opposed the establishment of the State Bank by speeches as well as by my vote. The former were never published but much of the matter of them is still remembered by Capt Nicholas Davis of Limestone County & John Sandridge Bibb Esq of Columbus Mississippi who were Members also of the Senate & united with me in opposition to the Bank.

I thought there no substitute could be found for the vigilance of the interest of individuals in the management of Banks. I believed favoritism would so frequently lead to loans & discounts that the career of the Bank would terminate in insolvency. As the Director of the Bank had no other interest in it than the other citizens of the State, were trustees merely & Alabama as the beneficiary was equitably the owner of the capital & entitled to all the profits which might be made. I entertained the opinion that the bills of the Bank intended to circulate as money would be bills of credit. That the issue of the paper of the Bank would therefore be a violation of that part of the Constitution of the U. States which prohibits any State from emitting bills of credit. My opposition to what was called the people's Bank diminished materially the stock of popularity I had accumulated which was shortly afterwards impaired again by my opposition to the election of Genl Jackson to the Office of President of the U. States. I am, as you know a Whig. Since

since the friends of Mr. Clay first brought him before the public as a Candidate for the Chief Magistracy of the U. States, I have preferred him to any other person for this high office. I have supported him wherever he was a Candidate for the Presidency.
I voted for Judge White in 1836 & Genl. Harrison in 1840 but never for Genl. Jackson.

In March 1825 immediately after the end of my senatorial term I returned to Huntsville to reside where I applied myself to my profession without any interruption till ~~1833~~ the summer of 1833 when I permitted my friends to announce me as a Candidate to represent Madison County in the House of Representatives of the General Assembly. I attended one meeting only of the people before the election & was chosen one of the Representatives of the County. The leading measure of the session of the Legislature of which I thus became a member was known as the Creek Controversy. It was between the Administration of the General Government & the Governor of Alabama. Personally friendly as I was to the Gentleman who was then the Governor & politically opposed to Genl. Jackson the conviction of my judgment led me to take the side of ~~his~~ the Administration. Of the latter in the controversy in support of my views I

delivered in the House the speech a printed copy of which I send you herewith by the Mail. I have not been a representative of the people since the close of the session of 1833–1834.

In January 1836 without my solicitation & without opposition I was elected by the Legislature one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of the State. I accepted the office because both political parties had united to elect me. I prepared myself my position at the Bar. In January 1837 I was appointed by my associates on the Bench Chief Justice of Alabama. In December 1836 the Whig members of the Legislature did me the honor to vote for me as a Senator in Congress against the Hon: John M. Kirkley now one of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the U. States who was then elected a Senator. They did me the same honor again in January 1844 when Mr Lewis was elected a Senator of the U. States. I was not at the seat of Government at the time of the election over me of Judge M. Kirkley nor during that session of the Legislature. During that session I sent to a friend who was a member of the Legislature my resignation of the judicial office which I held to be delivered to the Governor of the State. In a consultation with other friends it was decided to withhold the resignation & urge me to continue in the office. I held it till June 1837 when I resigned & my successor was elected by the Legislature then in an extraordinary session.

In the Summer of 1837 & shortly after my return to the Bar the number of the Commissioners of the U. States under the last treaty with the Cherokee tribe of Indians was increased from two to three & the administration of Mr Van Buren tendered me the additional office which I declined. I did not desire nor had I sought the office.

I was appointed by the Whigs of the State one of their delegates to the Harrisburg Convention in December 1839 which I was prevented from attending by my professional engagements. I was one of the Candidates on the Whig electoral ticket for President & Vice President in 1840 & addressed many public meetings during that year in most of the Northern counties in the State in support of the claims of Genl Harrison to the office of President.

In May 1844 I attended the Whig Convention at Baltimore as one of the delegates of the Whigs of Alabama. I presided as Chairman over that Convention while the body elected the President & other officers of the Convention. I addressed the people of the State frequently that year to induce them to vote for Mr Clay for the office of President.

Having determined to pursue my profession in some city & plant cotton in the Southern part of the State of Mississippi I selected St Louis as my residence which is as convenient to my planting interest as the city of Mobile. I settled in St Louis ~~in April~~ 1843. I had long been a sufferer

occasionally from rheumatism. The climate of that city was so different from what I had expected that ~~my fear that~~ I feared an increase of the disease I have mentioned would be the consequence of my permanent residence there & I therefore returned to Alabama in December 1843.

I send herewith a Biographical sketch of the late John W. Walker. Please return it to me after you have copied it.

Very Resptlly
Yr. Obt. Servt.

A. F. Hopkins

To A. J. Pickett Esq.

Montgomery
Alabama

Notes of the life
of
Hon A. H. Stephens

Biographical Sketch of the life
of John R. Walker written by Richard
Henry Wilde of Georgia

Copy of a Biographical Sketch of John Williams Walker by Richard Henry Wilde.

J. W. W. the subject of this brief memoir, assigned by the partiality of his family to one utterly unworthy of the task except by the love he bore him — was born in Virginia

While yet a child he accompanied his Father the Rev Jeremiah Walker who emigrated to Elbert County, Georgia.

His preceptor in the rudiments of education was the Rev Moses Waddel, long accustomed with an honest pride, to enumerate among his pupils, many of the most celebrated jurists & Statesmen of the South. He graduated with distinguished honor at Princeton, preserving during his Collegiate Course an untarnished moral character, and acquiring along with the reputation of an excellent scholar, a high relish for polite literature which he ever afterwards retained

On leaving College, he applied himself to the study of the law & though more than once interrupted by illness, his quick & keen perception of the right & just and the extent and variety of his previous attainments, speedily assured him clear and comprehensive views of the science, not always enjoyed by more laborious, but less sagacious students. Seeking the temple as a worshiper in Spirit and in truth, who regarded Jurisprudence not as a craft or mystery, but the noblest of sciences, he thus ensured his future superiority over practitioners, who treat their profession as an art, and its principles as a mere collection of rules and cases.

In 1810 Mr Walker then a resident of Petersburg Georgia, married Matilda, the daughter of Le Roy Pope Esq of the same village, and removed with his Father-in-law and sev

eral of their neighbours to Alabama then a territory, when they became the first settlers of Madison County and founded the now flourishing town of Huntsville. Here he began the practice of his profession, soon rose to eminence & was repeatedly ~~chosen~~ chosen a member of the Territorial Legislature. In 1819 he declined the office of District Judge, tendered him by President Monroe & in the same year was chosen to preside over the Convention which framed the Constitution of the State, an instrument indebted to him for many of its best provisions.

Immediately after its adoption and the admission of Alabama into the Union, he was elected United States senator, an office which he held untill 1823 when ill health compelled him to retire, and on the 23rd of April in that year, he passed away from life, leaving behind him the memory of no fault and the enmity of no human being.

In person Mr Walker was tall, his figure slender, but well formed, and his manners and address mild, graceful and preposessing.

He had blue eyes, ~~brown~~ brown hair, a fair complection, handsome features and a countenance whose expression habitually pensive, kindled into animation with every lofty thought and generous feeling. Even to a stranger his appearance was highly engaging and attractive, while to those who enjoyed his familiar conversation were charmed with the sweet low-tones of his ~~of his~~ colloquial eloquence, the intellectual music of a pure heart, a sound mind, a rich memory and brilliant imagination. Surrounded by friends who loved and honored or in the bosom of a family that idolized him, hour after hour vanished unconsciously in conversation grave or gay, upon the inexhaustible topics of art,

science, literature, government and morals, to all of which his perfect urbanity, extensive reading, the refinement of his taste, and the delicacy of his feelings gave interest & novelty. His letters many of which ~~many~~ ~~of which~~ have been preserved with reverential care are models of the familiar Epistolary style correct & sparkling yet free, cordial & unstudied:— now to the feeling of the moment and passing from the whimsical and excursive playfulness of Sterne to the pathos of Mc Kenzie, with all the graceful negligence of Byron & slip shod gossiping of Walpole.

Before the higher cares, and heavier burthens of life came upon him, he was like most other men of genius a rhymer, and the few specimens of his ~~genius~~ verse which had currency in the circles of his love and friendship, were ~~praised~~ prized, not unreasonably, as jewels by their possessors. "I might call them" said one of his admirers "poetic errors — imitations of the antique by Moore & Prior; but the gems were of a purer ray, if the workmanship of the artist was a little less perfect".

Mr Walker's literary attainments, far from impairing, increased his efficiency as a jurist and orator. Many it is true believe that belles-lettres schollarship is usually an impediment to forensic eloquence, but the examples of Mansfield and Blackstone, Story and Legare stamp this as a vulgar error. The prejudices of ignorance and envy may indeed retard the success of the most thorough-bred and highly educated, but in this case, as in every other, where industry and good sense are not wanting, all learning is useful, as well as ornamental, and ultimately tends to form the character of a perfect advocate. As might naturally be expected therefore, Mr Walker's cotemporaries at the bar, speak of his professional skill and knowledge with the highest praise

and assigned to him the palm for perswasive eloquence readiness of resource, and gentlemanly bearing -

In the Senate he was mainly instrumental in procuring the passage of the first law for the relief of purchasers of the public Lands emphatically a Bill of Peace, which, while it saved the new States from Bankruptcy, preserved their affections to the Union and led to the abolition of the Credit system, thus perverting future evils -

To this new theatre of usefulness and honor, Mr Walker brought ~~all~~ all the modest worth and unalloyed patriotism of Lowndes with much of the easy and graceful manner of ~~Lown~~ Forsyth, and to his career as a statesman only a longer life was wanting. But time, as it has been beautifully observed, is the indispensable ally of genious in its struggle for immortality, and though death may now shut the gate on other aspirants as highly gifted, it has never closed on one more fondly loved or more deeply mourned -

Mr Richard Henry Wilder's eulogy upon the life & character of Senator John W. Walker.