"Tampa is the Place of Places": The William G. Ferris Family Collection

Kyle S. VanLandingham

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Funeral invitation for Caroline (Rhodes) Ferris, first wife of Josiah Ferris

— Courtesy Ferris Family
"TAMPA IS THE PLACE OF PLACES":
The William G. Ferris Family Collection

Introduction and Notes by Kyle S. VanLandingham

The William G. Ferris Family Collection is an extensive body of letters and documents relating to the pioneer Ferris family of Tampa. There are numerous letters, dating from as early as 1852, mostly written by family members. In addition, there are account books, business receipts, shipping documents, social invitations, political material and early pictures of family members. The Tampa Historical Society extends its deep appreciation to Mrs. Esther Ferris Floyd, owner of the collection; her daughter, Mrs. Ginger Lee Floyd Phillips; and her sister-in-law Mrs. Elma Mann Ferris, widow of Bernhard Lee Ferris, for allowing the Sunland Tribune to publish several of the most significant letters and to reproduce a number of the fascinating nineteenth century documents. We also wish to thank Mr. Julius J. Gordon for his assistance in facilitating the publication of this material.

Introduction

William Gould Ferris was the founder of one of Tampa’s leading nineteenth century pioneer families. Born June 11, 1810 in Ovid, New York, he was the eldest of five children of Josiah and Lydia (Bangs) Ferris. As a young man, William went to the Choctaw Indian Nation Territory (Hempstead County, Arkansas), and was married there June 4, 1834 to Eliza Morris, a native of Fort Wayne, Ohio. She was born April 27, 1817.1

William G. Ferris arrived at Tampa Bay from Arkansas in 1841. He was employed by the U. S. Army and received orders from a ship in the bay which transferred him to East Florida. The following year, in 1842, he returned with his family to settle at Fort Brooke, where he served as acting paymaster and sutler to the troops. William soon opened a general merchandise and clothing store which was washed away during the hurricane of 1848. He then built another store on the south side of Whiting Street which he operated until 1857, when he moved the store to the northeast corner of Washington and Monroe Streets (now Florida Ave.). Also in 1857, William G. Ferris constructed a new two-story home for his family on Washington Street, just east of the store.2

In addition to being a prominent merchant, William was a pioneer in the shipping business and owned a number of schooners and steamers. The Florida Peninsular reported on August 2, 1856:

It will be seen by reference to our advertisement columns, that W. G. Ferris & Son have purchased the large and fast-sailing Schooner, Harrison Jones, and will place her
and the Schooner John J. Taylor upon the Tampa and New Orleans trade.

The above vessels will arrange their sailing so as to depart from each port at the same time, allowing a month for one trip, thus making a semi-monthly line of schooners. This is a matter long neglected, which the necessities of this community have loudly called for, and we hope now that it has been undertaken by this enterprising firm, it will receive liberal encouragement from our citizens.3

Perhaps the most famous of the Ferris ships was the steamer Scottish Chief. The Peninsular reported on July 28, 1860 that W. G. Ferris and Son had entered the cattle business and had purchased a small steamer, the Scottish Chief, "a ship well calculated for the cattle industry."4 Later during the Civil War, the Scottish Chief was used as a blockade runner by Capt. James McKay and was set afire and sunk by Union forces in the Hillsborough River in October, 1863.5

William G. Ferris was a leader in many fields. He was a founder and fifth largest stockholder of the Florida Peninsular Railroad Company in 1859 and was president of the Tampa Ice Company which erected an ice house on Washington Street in 1860. On Nov. 24, 1860 when Hillsborough Countians convened in a mass meeting at the Alafia to urge secession of Florida from the Union, W. G. Ferris was among those present who signed the petition calling for a state convention to consider the matter.6

After the Civil War, the Ferrises resumed their shipping business and continued to operate their general store. The eldest son, Josiah, who had been born in Arkansas, Aug. 5, 1836, continued as partner with his father. Josiah was elected to the Tampa City Council in 1866, served as Mayor protem in 1869, City Clerk in 1877-79 and Clerk and Treasurer in 1881. He was also in the jewelry and watch and clock repair business. He and his father served on the first vestry of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in 1871.7

Always the trailblazer, Col. Wm. G. Ferris was reported by the Sunland Tribune in June 1879 as converting the lighting of his residence from kerosene to gas. In 1880, his son Henry Clarke Ferris was elected Mayor of Tampa. Eliza (Morris) Ferris died in Tampa, Oct. 30, 1891. Col. W. G. Ferris passed away in Tampa, Aug. 3, 1895, after a long and productive life.8

All or a portion of eleven letters are reproduced in this article. They are presented without changes in spelling or punctuation. At the end of the article, endnotes 9 through 19 provide further explanation as to the persons, places and events mentioned in the letters.

Letter from Mary E. Ferris to Aunt Katura
Tampa Bay E Florida
30th May 1852

Dear Aunt,

I received your letter of the as this morning and was very glad to hear from you I have news for you Hardy and Mrs Martin are married would you of thought it she went with Mrs. Deerfield and I to Key West on the
William Gould Ferris, 1810-1895

Eliza (Morris) Ferris, 1817-1891

William G. Ferris, Jr. 1844-1867

All pictures and documents courtesy Ferris Family
steam boat and then came back and got married. A Baptist minister married them there was no one to the wedding but Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham and the preacher she had on a long white veil dress and white shoes no one knew of it until next morning and then Mr. Fisher took the Dray and Abram to drive and went up to call on the bride and Abram handed him out of the Dray and waited for him to come out again when he helped him in and they drove off in fine style and oh I wish that you could of been here that night. about ten o'clock they turned out the greatest noise you ever heard old pots and tin pans and every thing that would make a noise they had. you may guess that it must of been some then they had a dog hurling him up and down the Piazza by the tail. Every body turned out old and young the made Hardy come out and demanded Fifty dollars they had to serenade him three nights before he would consent to it and worse every night he is to pay it by the first of June if not they go at it again it is for the Methodist Church the first night the men came down from the mill with their guns thought the indians had come she dont seem to mind it all she goes around the streets with all Spencers and Kendricks children following after her its nothing but Aunt Ellen

we are looking for Josiah back now all the time he went on the Steamer to New Orleans we are also looking for the Roleph, Mr. and Mrs. Evrelle[?] have gone home. Mrs. Clark had been on as far as Augusta and has returned let me know if Aunt Harriet got my letter

I am very glad to hear that Catherine has not forgotten me. Write as soon as you get this I remain your affectionate niece.

Mary E. Ferris to Aunt Katura
PS Captain Casey sends his love to you
Mary E. Ferris to Katura

Letter from W.G. Ferris, Jr. to his Grandfather Josiah Ferris.

Tampa
July 20\(^{th}\) 1858

Dear Grand Pa

I have taken this opportunity of writing to you a few lines to let you know that I am well and I should like for this to find you the same I have written you four or five letters and have not received an answer to none of them and so i thought i would try it again I am going to school to a new teacher and am learning very fast. he has a full school the people in Tampa like his teaching very well he has about forty scholars I am in Latin now and am getting along very well and besides all with the rest of my studies. Our Court House is about to fall down they have taken every thing that is valuable out of it so it wont hurt anything when it falls they want it to fall very much We have had several weddings in our City lately all of this place Mr. Thomas married Miss Sallie McKay - a large merchant's daughter they were about to shivare them but they begged so hard that they thought they would let them off if they would give a large dance and they
agreed to do it. It came off last night all of us had an invitation but none did go the other couples done the same. The Indians are about to leave Florida Capt. McNeil one of the volunteers captains had a talk with them and they agreed to go some of them has gone about one hundred and seventy or eighty. Captain Nelson was here a few days ago from New Orleans bringing us news from Aunt Eliza she is coming here to make a visit Pa thinks of going on North before long there is not much news in our city at present.

I remain your grandson

W. G. Ferris Jr.

Give my love to Grand Ma and all the rest

Letter from William Ferris to his Grandfather, Josiah Ferris in N. Y.

Tampa April 26th 1680

Dear Grand Father,

I take this opportunity of answering your letter which I should of done before now but being as I am at school and when school is over I am in the store I have but little time only on Saturdays and Sundays and then I feel as though I ought to have a little recreation and never think of writing. We have received a cargo of ice from Boston and it is quite lively in our City now as the Schooner is discharging it to see the Boys and People (generally) carrying it off. Pa is President of the company and he has his share of it packing it in the Ice House as it comes off of the schooner it is the first load of Ice that has been landed here in six years and it is quite a treat to see it. We expect to keep cool this summer if Ice can do it as we have one hundred and thirty tons the first snow I ever saw was when the schooner opened her hatches it was frozen on the Ice that was a curiosity also we have also a Soda Fountain and an Ice Cream Saloon just fixed up so that this summer we can enjoy ourselves better than we ever did in this place. Although I expect the subject of ice you care but little about as you have so much of it about you and therefore I will change the subject. As I wrote you some time since about a Rail Road coming to our place we believe it stronger than ever now as the Engineers of the Rail Road have surveyed the land and we expect before many days to hear her puffing. Grand Ma was glad to hear from you. I gave mine and her own letter and she went up stairs and took her time to read them she is well and gaining in weight all the while we tell her if she would spend the summer here that she would weigh two hundred pounds but I think that she is thinking of home too strong to stay here much longer. I think if you was to come out here that you would like our country very much and the People also you could go to some of our large Sugar Plantations and see them making sugar I think that you would like it and I think that the climate would be ______ you. As I know of but little news to write to you about you must excuse my short letters and bad writing especially this letter as I wrote it in school and had to be in a hurry for fear of missing my lessons. Write soon give my love to Aunt Harriet and tell her I would like to receive a letter from
The Orange Grove Hotel was Tampa's social center during the 1870s and early 1880s.

Two documents from the 1887-1888 Yellow Fever Epidemic

The "Perry Guards" was an independent volunteer company formed in Tampa in 1860.

Josiah Ferris' receipt for a year's subscription to the Tampa Florida Peninsular, 1867-1868.
her very much and also my cousins
if they think enough of me to write
write soon all is well

I remain your Grand Son

William Ferris
Tampa
Fla

Letter from William Ferris to his
Grandfather Josiah Ferris
Tampa Florida
May 3rd 1861

Dear Grand-Father

Your kind letter was received a few
days ago and we were glad to hear
from you. I might of been more
punctual in answering your letters
but as there is but little news in our
City is is almost impossible to write
a letter. Business is quite dull we are
scarcely doing anything in the line of
selling goods. Pa is shipping Cattle
to Cuba and it keeps us pretty busy
at times He went to Cuba last week
and will start again on Sunday with
200 head of cattle and will return
again on Sunday week following.
Josiah and myself we mind the store
and the Cattle while Pa sells them.
Ask Grand ma if she has been eating
green corn yet tell her we have had it
for dinner nearly every day for three
weeks and besides vegetables of all
kinds. Our Farmers will make plenty
of corn this season and tho War we
can stand pretty well corn potatoes
and Beef will keep any man from
starving to death and besides put him
in a good spirit for fighting. I sup-
pose that it is getting to look
something like war in your Country
now as we hear from the Papers that
your States begin to feel uneasy
about the ways that the South are
progressing and we know that she
will progress until the North will
abide by her rules and sooner the
better for one and all as their is but
little news in our town you must not
expect to receive a long letter from
me but the next time I write I will try
and do a little better. All the folks
are well excepting Sissy she has
been quite sick but improving now
Hoping that these few lines will find
you all enjoying good health. I
remain your affectionate Grand son

William Ferris

P.S. write soon

Letter from Henry L. Crane to Josiah
Ferris
Fernandina
Jany 12th 1862

Dear Friend,

I suppose you think that I care very
little about Tampa & its people. it
would appear so by my neglecting to
write to my old friends. I assure you
that I think Tampa is the place of
places none that I have seen yet (but
it is few that I've seen) can compare
with it in anything. I can never forget
the happy times we used to have at
the Band-room and at our concerts. I
have heard no music since I been
here with the exception of
break-downs in the Soldiers Camps.
The Mississippi Reg. has a Band of
12 instruments but I have not heard
them play yet; their camp is about
six miles from here on the other side
of the bridge. I think with a little
perserverence and a great deal of
Envelope and invitation to the 50th Anniversary Celebration for Mrs. And Mrs. W. G. Ferris, Sr.

Ship’s manifest (Bill of Landing) for Ferris Schooner Delia
mind you can master the Soprano — as soon as you can form an am [?] you will not have much trouble; if you would meet and practice often it would help you very much I know that I can blow better when all the instruments are playing than when playing alone.

Col. Hopkins is anxious to purchase our instruments if he could get some one to teach, but I think that he would be mustered out of service before they could learn to play. War news is much like it is at Tampa. All sorts of reports and nothing reliable. I believe it is a fact that Mason & Slidell have sailed for England in a British steamer. The Blockade is very strict on this Coast there is a Steamer in sight nearly all the time, two are in sight to-day, one of them not more than three or four miles from shore below the Batteries. Gen Lee & Gen Mercer arrived here last night from Savannah they think there will certainly be an attack made on this place very soon. Gen. Burnside's fleet passed Cape Hatteras a few days ago, and it is supposed for this place, but it may be intended for the Gulf. I think he will get his sides burnt if he comes here.

Jas. McKay arrived here last night he left his wife at Waldo, not willing to risk her here for the present.

The S. S. Guards are getting along finely, there is much sickness in camps, but so far they have been very healthy. Florence Andrew is the only one sick he has a touch of the measles there is about 200 sick at present two or three die nearly every day. — The Mississippi Regiment suffer most.

Remember me to all the members of the T.B. C. Please write soon and let me know what is going on in Tampa. — you seem to be as gay as ever, if parties & are indication. S. Stringer saw your Father in Tallahassee a few days ago. Nothing more at present but remain

Yours Respectfully
in T.B. & C
H. L. Crane

P.S. If there is anything that I could do for you over here I would be very happy to do it. H.L.C. 13

————

Letter from John Edward Spencer to Wm. G. Ferris, Jr.

St. Marks, Fla.

February 29th, 1864

Friend Billie: I was truly sorry to learn of your sad misfortune. I was in Tallahassee on the 24th inst. but knew nothing of you being there until I started back. Col. Magbee told me of your being wounded and stopping with Mr. Rhodes' family. I regretted it very much. But you are fortunate, Billie, not to be in a worse condition than you are. If I could get off I would come up and see you, but our captain is very strict and I don't suppose that he would grant me permission to leave again so soon. Billie, I am so unfortunate as to be cast away off from friends aboard a C.S. Steamer, — "a gun boat" at St. Marks don't you sympathize with
me? I can't see any one here that I can call a friend, especially one that I cherish as a friend from my boyhood days as your self. Ah! Billie, still fresh in my memory is our boyhood days, where we enjoyed life together — little did I think . . . four years ago when we were together in our dear little city of Tampa that our fate would have been what it is at the present time. Ah! time tells us what is in the future. Billie, the way that I console myself now . . . I tear myself from all society — such as we have her — and get off to myself and ponder over the happy days gone by. I still live in hopes that ere a long while, we will all meet our dear friends at our happy homes — and oh! what a joyful time that will be! I have not heard from home in two months. I am troubled about home on the receipt of this if you arc able — write me all the news. I belong to the Navy department at this place. I will try and get off in a week or two and see you.

Very Respectfully, your true friend
Edward Spencer

Letter from J. E Henderson to William Ferris, Jr., in Tallahassee, Florida.

Gainesville, March 8th, [1864]

"Buckshot" — Maj. Summers came down from the front yesterday. He says he sought for you in Lake C. but you had gone up to Tallahassee. I had heard you were wounded. Maj. S. tells me he heard you highly lauded for high soldierly capacities displayed in the very short time you were with your company and for very meritorious conduct on the field. I am proud of you. Let me congratulate you.

I hope your wound may prove trifling but you have a scar to be proud of — and have seen an action you may relate to your children years hence as a crowning glory.

About the time of the fight I sent you a letter from your father under cover to Capt. McNail. I hope you received it. I have not heard a word from home since then except by Mr. McKay. I am assured though the Yankees have not molested our people since. Mr. MK tells nothing strange. he saw your family — all well.

We are removed up here for a short time to ship the accumulations of Company Stores. By some mischance everything is so mixed up that it consumes a very great while to put it in shape. The Yankees when here interferred with nothing belonging to us. They gave Capt. Baya's store up to the Citizens though some of whom availed themselves of the opportunity to lay up little supplies of such trifling articles as Coffee, Sugar etc. By some accident however one of our warehourses was burned consuming about 150 Bls syrup.

Did you hear of the elder Bates exploit at Archer. Being firmly convinced the enemy were approaching, with a patriotic ardor, and spirit determined not to suffer them to have anything whatever, he sailed out of the depot at Archer some 250 barrels syrup and smashed them in
and inconveniently fled to parts unknown — where the Yankees did not approach.

The Company Dictionary was likewise in the fight. Did you hear whether he distinguished himself.

There are rumors that the Yankies were withdrawing - and it was supposed would next advance from the Gulf Coast Suwanee R. probably. This may have been supposed only from the fact that Gen Beauregard went through to No 4 on the Florida RR — probably with eye to such movement on the part of the Yankees. The beauties of the place were at the depot to see the General. He came out the cars very condescendingly and shook hands with the crowd and like the King of
France went on again. The Gainesvillians did not make a dazzling display.

I should be glad to hear from you. I would not have written first to you inasmuch as you promised to write me, but I must [?] you on your exploits.

Give my respects to Mr. and Mrs. J.E, Miss Estella & C. and believe me Yours truly J.E Henderson

Letter from John H. Rhodes to his daughter Caroline Ferris and family in Tampa

Tallahassee
12 January 1867

My dear children again we are permitted to enter a new year with changes, hoping this may find you all well and well doing this leaves us all well except your Gran Mother and myself She has been confined to her bed for a few days but got up yesterday my health had not been good since I left there and does not improve any, but hope soon to be able to leave here and spend my time with you I believe I should enjoy better health provided I cold have anything to do that would not be too laborious I am unable to attend to official business except writing times are dull here as I ever saw it money scarce. I should have come this trip but Judge Baker has been so sick that he put off the Wakulla Court, until next Monday week and I have to be their or would have to lose my case. their and another thing the people that live in my house last so damaged it that I have to have it repaired before the person which is Mrs. Joe Chaires that has it rented this year can move in it. Mrs. Grant has left your Gran Mothers and her health so very bad that we concluded to stay a while with her. Estell & Capt. Cogswell was married the 24th December last we all occupy Mrs. Grant's room as they will not consent for me to sleep out of their away from the fire. I did not receive the fish roe nor lemons I suppose the boat took them to Neworleans. I understand the Boat has returned but wasnot able to see Capt McKay to ascertain the cause of my not receiving them Mr. Andrew Denham wrote me that whenever you sent anything from there that you must write him and he would attend to receiving and forwarding he is Rail Road agt at St. Mark's. I have nothing good to send you as I didnot know until last night that the Boat was in and would leave this morning before I could get out It being very cole disagreeable weather. It is now just 3 o'clock and I thought you woud be uneasy unless I wrote a few lines to you Miss Lidia Grant I understand is expected soon to be married to a Dr. Best said to be a very fine young man. Your Gran Mother has endeavored to get Robert Bruce to go on marry Miss Molly, Could she ever get him in a condition to do so. You didnot say whether or not you have a cook the Negroes here are very independant donot wish much to work for the whites. we have to murders committed here very lately by the whites and many by blacks Mr. Richard Jenkins was killed the third day after his Mothers arival
here by a Lt Kemper which is now in jail. Major Henderson Col Magbees wifes brother was killed last week in Wakulla County by Mr. Hardison, which is here in jail. One of the regular soldiers killed another a few days since it is almost dangerous to pass here at night the soldiers are committing so many depredations by theft &c. You didnot say if Atty was school or not nor if she needs books or what. I do trust that the child has respect enough for herself and family to try and get a little education so that she willnot afraid nor ashamed to go into or be seen in company do let me know on return of Boat what she may need and also what I can bring for any of you.

Josiah I hope you have made some arrangement in New York about getting some goods. pleas let me know I donot know if I can or not but have you not I will try as I hate to come there and do nothing and let me know what kind

Mrs. Bruce Estell Capt Cogswell send their love to you all Give my love to sister Mr. Grant and family and Sissy Ferris Mr. Alberry if you see her kiss Atty and my dear little Willey tell him when I come I have got a pet chicken, two little lambs & 2 kids and want to get if I can a pair of pigs. and receive a receive a kiss from your affectionate father.

J.H. Rhodes

15th September 1867

Dear Mother,
Your letter of 22nd August reached me by last mail and found us at that time as well as usual since that time Eliza and Josiah have both been taken unwell, nothing more serious I think than chill & fever, which can soon be conquered. Eliza and Josiah are both up this morning and under the Quinine treatment We have had a great deal of sickness in this place, and throughout the Country, undoubtedly occasioned by the excessive rains, the like of which was never before known here I cannot tell when we have had 24 hours without rain the next street North of my house is almost impassable at any time and a part of the time almost swimming We have not had any malls since June until a few days since when I wrote to James So if you had written every day I could not have received your letters

I wrote to James if Nelson was not coming out for him to come by the middle of next month the reason I did not fully explain, but gave him to understand I hope you will come with him Come by water to Fernandina or "Jacksonville" by Rail Road to "Gainesville" and by stage to "Ocala" where I will have a convenance to meet you, if he will telegraph to "Bartow" to me at what time he will probably be at "Ocala" You can as well leave home as not Your chickens can be attended to by harriet and I think all at home will be pleased to have you again get a new lease of life. I do not think the trip as I have planned it will not be very uncomfortable or fatiguing.

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I would have said to come by Key West, but there may be sickness at that place, and consequently I recommend the other I cannot offer a great many inducements for you to come other than the benefit of our climate, which you have before proved to be beneficial to you, unless it be that the little Negros that you before saw running about as slaves well fed, and clothed, are now Free hungry and naked, if sick, die, for want of attention, as the parents will not do anything for themselves or each other — not a very gratifying sight for a person of your disposition, still it is true.

Since I wrote to James, Wm's wife has left on a visit to her Mothers. Our grand child was a spoiled boy here. Everyone in the house, and the "darkeys" in the yards contributing He would at any time leave his Mother to go to his Grand Mother — and I think his going away has helped on her present illness. We all miss him — very much.

Josiah has removed to Williams house, the "Post" or "Palmer House" as you may remember it. — the place will do well in dry weather, but now it is a hard matter to get to it

You write of high wages with you If you can get people to work at that, is more than we can do, they will take the wages, but when it comes to the work, you must do it yourself or it is not done — such is the case generally — tho' we perhaps are now blessed in servants tho' we have but one that we owned previous to the War, You and James may both recollect "Wade" Kate's husband who says he never was as well off as when belonging to me, and that he intends to stay as long as I will let him. . . .

Kate, that nursed our smaller children and that I thought would never leave us, still holds off, but I am under the impression will soon be begging to again become one of the family Isaac, I think you have been told, died of consumption in Key West. his wife Winney wishes to return to us . . .

Mrs. McCarty still lives where she did when you was here, and still a widow, tho' it would not surprize me to hear of her marrying at any time, as she is still young and good looking. besides, she has a house to shelter a husband.

Mrs. Kate somebody from here has told you, died about a year since. The McKay family appear to be in a flourishing condition

We have Baptist, Methodist and Catholic Services on each Sabbath, and I f we are not a very good people, should be, but I am afraid that the preachers get poorly paid I do not see how it can be otherwise as it is a hard struggle for the best to get along.

I will thank you to say to Harriet that a postage stamp costs but three cents and that she might show her sisterly affection, (if she has any) at least once in 5 years she certainly has as much time to write as I have, and I know the Musquitos' are not as bad with you as us, at this time.

Eliza and the children join me in love to all — and I hope to soon hear that you are coming out
Write soon, and tell me all the news
Yr affectionate Son
W.G. Ferris

Letter from Josiah Ferris to his wife
Maggie
Tampa Fla
June 30th 1879
My Darling Wife
Your kind and loving letter of the 23inst came safe to hand yesterday - and you well know how proud and happy I was to receive it. I am so delighted to know that you and my boy are all right. . . .
You ask what we are going to do on the fourth. As for my part I expect to do nothing in the way of celebrating the day. You know that I don't take much stock in that. The 24th of July is my day to celebrate. When the war ended all of my patriotism oozed out — and I don't think a good Southern person has any right to hurrah for the glorious fourth. The folks on Nebraska Avenue are making extensive preparation for the event. They are building a stage for dancing in old man Robles grove and decorating it with the flags from vessels in port — and the ground is white with the bloom of the orange. You ought to be here to enjoy the delightful weather — cool nights and moonlight — orange blooms Myrtle Lillys & Jesimines and as a Cape Coder would say It is dreadful. . . .
Joe . . .

Letter from Wm. G. Ferris to his brother
James L. Ferris
Tampa, Fla
6th Feb. 1882
Dear Bro. Jas. L.
Your letter of long ago came to hand in due course of mail, and should have been replied to long since, but a variety of causes has prevented principally my old complaint Laziness. and I had nothing in particular to write about unless it be that we are all quite well — not froze out as you in your country seem to be. — We have had no frost in town, tho some has been reported out in the country — Oranges are in Bloom and a large quantity yet to market Tomatoes are shipped each trip of the steamers also Egg Plants, and Cucumbers altho we are eating Green Peas new Irish Potatoes and strawberries from our garden we do not expect to ship any from that Source —
We are now expecting a Rail Road, but whether it comes in my time or not only will show — It is now about 70 miles from here and daily coming nearer — that is one — another has commenced grading from town towards Jacksonville — and still another has surveyors on the route from Live Oak. Which will get her first I do not know — But this I do know that the country is filling up fast with settlers, and that all good orange lands, or lands suitable for raising vegetables is commanding high prices — say from 5 to 150 $ per acre according to location and improvement.
Remember us to all. — and write as often as you find opportunity — in haste

Affectionately

W. G. Ferris

ENDNOTES


4 *Tampa Florida Peninsular*; July 28, 1860.


8 *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, June 12, 1879, Aug. 12, 1880; McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, III, 394.

9 The author of this letter was Mary Eliza Ferris, daughter of Wm. G. and Eliza (Morris) Ferris. She was born July 28, 1838 in Arkansas and married Robert Brenham Thomas in Hillsborough County on Jan. 19, 1854. She died in Tampa at the age of 18, shortly after the birth of her second child. She was 14 when she wrote this letter to "Aunt Katura." She tells of the marriage of Hardy D. Kendrick, one of Tampa's early lawyers, to Mrs. Ellen Martin, widow of Rev. Alexander Martin, May 12, 1852. The festivities mentioned in the letter which occurred after the wedding, were part of the pioneer shivaree or chivaree custom. The Roleph was the John Roalef, a schooner owned by W. G. Ferris which ran aground during hurricane in 1853. Capt. James McKay bought the schooner where it had grounded and later used the ship in his business activities. McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, III, 394; John H. Baxley, Julius J. Gordon, and Diane M. Rodriguez, Oaklawn Cemetery and St. Louis Catholic Cemetery: Bilgraphical and historical Gleanings, 2 vols. (Tampa, 1991), I, 499; Kyle S. VanLandingham, *In Pursuit of Justice: Law and Lawyers in Hillsborough County, 1846-1996* (Tampa, 1996), 9., Tampa Tribune, March 26, 1950.

10 William Gould Ferris, Jr., was born in Tampa, July 29, 1844, the third child of Wm. G. and Eliza (Morris) Ferris. He was approaching his 14th birthday when wrote this letter to his grandfather, Josiah Ferris. The courthouse which was "about to fall down," had been constructed only a few years earlier, in 1854-55. Mr. Thomas was Robert Brenham Thomas, West Point graduate, whose first wife, Mary Eliza Ferris, had died the previous year. Thomas was now marrying his second wife, Sarah J. McKay, May 21, 1858. She was the daughter of Capt. James McKay, the "large merchant." McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, III, 394-395; Baxley, et al, *Oaklawn Cemetery*, II, 836; VanLandingham, *In Pursuit of Justice*, 12-13. For more on the end of the Third Seminole War, see "The End of the Third Seminole War," *Sunland Tribune* 18 (November 1992), 101.

11 Col. Wm. G. Ferris, Sr., was the president of the Tampa Ice Company, established in March 1860 and was a founder and fifth largest stockholder in the Florida Peninsular Railroad, established in 1859. The railroad never got to Tampa, the only construction being a graded right of way from Waldo to Ocala. Grandma was Lydia (Bangs) Ferris, age 67, on a visit to her son's family in Tampa. Aunt Harriet was a younger sister of Wm. G. Ferris, Sr. *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, June 11, 28, July 16, 1859, March 24, 1860; George W. Pettengill, "The story of the Florida Railroads;" *Sunland Tribune* 18 (November 1992), 101.

12 In 1860 W. G. Ferris, Sr., purchased the *Scottish Chief*, a steamer which he used in the cattle trade. The Civil War had been underway for three weeks when William, Jr., wrote this letter. The 17-year old boy was clearly filled with Southern patriotism. On March 15, 1863, he enlisted at Brooksville, in Co. I, 9th Florida Infantry, CSA. He was described as 5' 10", with
dark hair, hazel eyes and fair skin. Tampa Florida Peninsular; July 28, 1860; David W. Hartman and David J. Coles, comps., Biographical Roster of Florida’s Confederate and Union Soldiers: 1861-1865, 6 vols. (Wilmington, NC, 1995), III, 971.

13 Henry Lafayette Crane was born Sept. 25, 1838 at St. Augustine, the son of Henry A. Crane. He came to Tampa with his parents in the early 1850s. During the Civil War he served as Chief Musician of the Fourth Florida Infantry, CSA. He was captured near Spring Hill, Tennessee, Dec. 21, 1864, confined at Camp Chase, Ohio, and released Feb. 18, 1865. Crane and the Ferris brothers, Josiah and William, had been members of the Tampa Brass Cornet Band, organized March 31, 1860, by J. A. Butterfield. The band’s musical instruments were purchased for $170.11 from W. G. Ferris and Co. The “S.S. Guards” were the Sunny South Guards, a Tampa company commanded by Capt. John T. Lesley. They became Co. K, 4th Florida Infantry. Baxley, et al, Oaklawn Cemetery, I, 243; Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers who served in Organizations from Florida, Dept. of War, National Archives; Grismer, Tampa, 134. Gen Lee was Robert E. Lee, commander of coastal defenses in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Fernandina was Florida’s principal east coast port and fell to the Federals in early March 1864. John E. Johns, Florida During the Civil War Gainesville, FL, 1963), 61-63.

14 John Edward Spencer was born Aug. 13, 1841, the son of Wm. S. Spencer. He came with his parents to Hillsborough County in 1846. He enlisted June 6, 1861, in Co. K, 4th Florida Infantry, CSA, the Sunny South Guards. He resigned Oct. 22, 1863 and subsequently served in Co. A, 2nd Fla. Battalion, CSA. At the time of this letter, he was serving aboard a Confederate steamer at St. Marks. William G. Ferris, Jr. had been wounded at the Battle of Olustee, Feb. 20, 1864, and was hospitalized at Lake City, but then went to Tallahassee to convalesce at the home of John H. Rhodes. Rhodes was the father of Caroline, who had married William’s brother, Josiah, June 10, 1862. Col. Magbee was James T. Magbee, Tampa’s first lawyer, who moved to Wakulla County after losing his seat in the Florida Senate in 1862. Grismer, Tampa, 318; Hartman and Coles, Biographical Roster; I, 450, III, 971, 1176; Ferris Family Notes; McKay, Pioneer Florida, III, 394-395; VanLandingham, In Pursuit of Justice, 8, 18.

15 James Fletcher Henderson was born Sept. 19, 1843, the son of Andrew J. Henderson. He came with his family to Tampa in 1847 and he and his elder brother John became lawyers. James also served in the Confederate forces. The Battle of Olustee was the most important battle to occur on Florida soil during the Civil War and was a significant Confederate victory. Baxley, et al, Oaklawn Cemetery, I, 442; Federal Works Agency, Works Progress Administration of Florida, Register of Deceased Veterans, Florida, No. 29, Hillsborough County (St. Augustine, 1940-41), 3; For more on the Battle of Olustee, see Leland Hawes, "Glory Troops on Florida Soil" and "Wounded Blacks Lucky to Survive," Tampa Tribune, April 1, 1990.

16 The Leon County 1860 Census shows John H. Rhodes, age 43, city official, born North Carolina, worth $4,000 in personal property and $4,000 in real estate. His wife, Julia Ann, was 45. They had three children: Caroline Victoria, 20, music teacher, born Florida; Estell Blanche, 12 and Oceanna Atty, 9. Bureau of the Census, Eighth United States Census, 1860, Leon County, Florida (population schedules).

17 W. G. Ferris alludes to the 1867 yellow fever epidemic in Tampa. His wife, Eliza, and son, Josiah, were both sufferers, but survived the disease. James was James Leroy Ferris (1830-1884), younger brother of Wm. G. Ferris. William G. Ferris, Jr., died July 27, 1867. He had married Florence Hunter, May 25, 1865. They had a child, William Hunter, born in 1867. Wade, Kate, Isaac and Winney were former slaves of the Ferris family. Harriet (1823-1911), was W. G. Ferris’ sister. McKay, Pioneer Florida, II, 39, III, 395; Ferris Family Notes; For more on the McKay family’s "flourishing condition" after the Civil War, see Canter Brown, Jr., “Tampa’s James McKay and the Frustration of Confederate Cattle-Supply Operations in South Florida,” Florida Historical Quarterly 70 (April 1992), 409-433.

18 Josiah Ferris’ first wife, Caroline, died Nov. 1, 1871. He then married Maggie Lou Knight, July 24, 1872. She was born in Henry County, Alabama, Apr. 10, 1848 and died at Tampa, May 26, 1897. Josiah had four children by his first marriage and three by his second marriage.
When he refers to the 24th of July as his "day to celebrate," he is referring to his and Maggie's wedding anniversary. McKay, *Pioneer Florida*, III, 394-396; Ferris Family Notes.

19 This is one of the last letters in the collection written by Wm. G. Ferris, Sr. He did live to see the coming of the railroad to Tampa in 1884. Grismer, Tampa, 174-175.