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GEORGE MEADE, JOHN PEMBERTON, AND A. P. HILL: ARMY RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE FLORIDA CRISIS OF 1849-1850

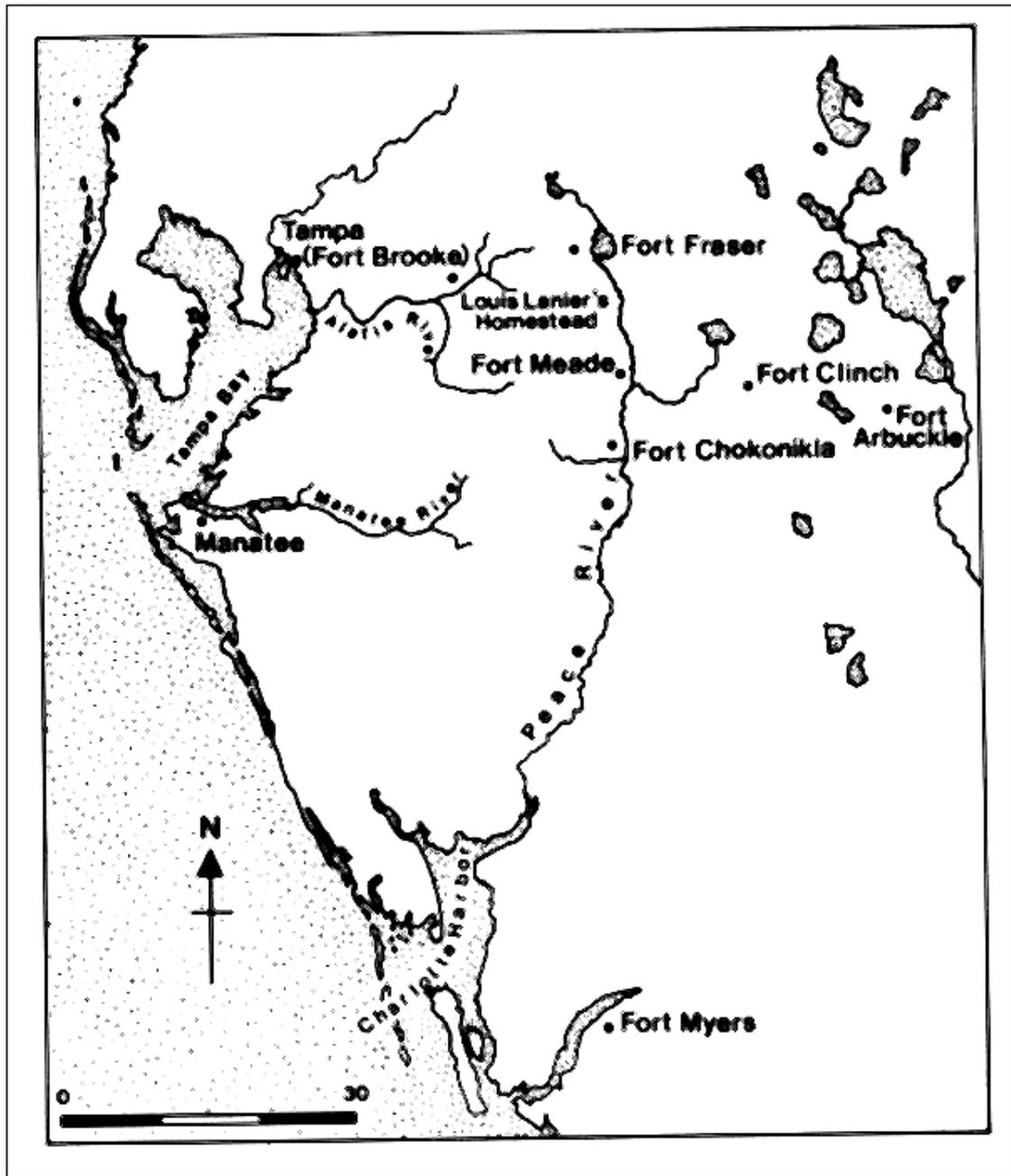
by Canter Brown, Jr.

During the closing months of 1849 and the early months of 1850, the United States was deeply enmeshed in a sectional crisis that threatened the breakup of the Union. Stemming primarily from the issue of slavery in territories recently gained from Mexico, the crisis produced calls for secession of slave states and resulted in a bitter struggle within the Congress. Although the issue temporarily was resolved by the adoption of the Compromise of 1850, the preceding national debate served as a prelude to the secession crisis of 1860-1861 and the resulting Civil War.¹

As the nation dealt with its secession crisis in 1849 and 1850, Florida grappled with a crisis of a different nature. An Indian attack upon two isolated civilian outposts deep in the state's peninsula provoked fears of an all-out Indian war and brought calls for the expulsion of the several hundred Seminoles, Mikasukies, and Tallahasseees remaining in and near the Everglades. During the year following the July 1849 attack, almost 2,000 regular soldiers of the United States Army served in the state, together with a score or more of officers who would, within fifteen years, become general officers in the Civil War.²

An examination of the service of several of those officers in Florida during the Indian scare illustrates the importance of pre-Civil War army relationships and may help to explain the later actions of Union and Confederate officers. For instance, a question such as George Meade's reluctance to pursue Robert E. Lee's forces in the aftermath of the battle at Gettysburg may take on a different coloration when viewed within the context of Meade's personal assessment, gained over decades of Army service, of such fellow officers as John Gibbon, Abner Doubleday, George Washington Getty, Darius Nash Couch, William Thomas Harbaugh Brooks, and William W. Morris, or his knowledge of such opponents as Ambrose Powell Hill and Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox. Likewise, a more complete understanding of the action of Meade's friend and fellow Philadelphian, John Clifford Pemberton, in surrendering Confederate forces at Vicksburg may be gained through a clarification of his previous relationships with Joseph Eggleston Johnston, Theophilus Hunter Holmes, Braxton Bragg, and William Whann Mackall. All of these individuals - and numerous others who undertook vital roles in the Civil War - served in Florida in the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), the Indian scare of 1849-1850, or both.³

The role of Florida service in the development of the army and of the talents of its officers is a subject upon which much work remains to be done. Yet, clearly Florida experiences served as important catalysts in molding the army and its officers in the pre-Civil War era. As one historian has pointed out, 10,169 individuals served in the regular services in Florida during the Second Seminole War. Fourteen percent of that number died there, and seventy-four of the fatalities were commissioned officers. Only in the summer of 1838 was the authorized enlisted strength of the United States Army increased to 11,800 men. As late as April 1842, 5,076 regulars still were on duty in the state.⁴



Map by Robert Trout.

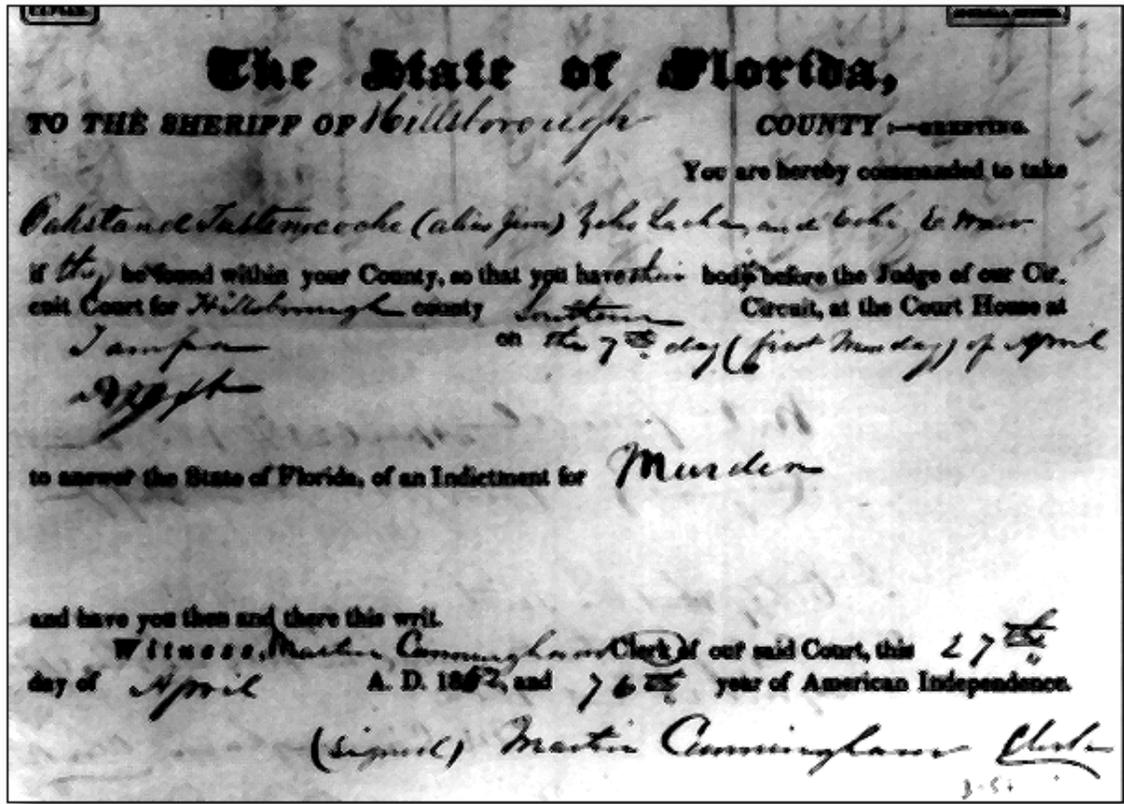
Although little information on the personal impact of Florida service has been published, two accounts reveal the critical effect Florida relationships and experiences had upon the lives and careers of officers. The first account detailed a series of incidents involving two friends, Thomas J. Jackson and William Henry French, which occurred in 1850 and 1851 at Fort Meade, a post named in 1849, as we shall see, in honor of George Meade. The events led to “Stonewall” Jackson’s arrest for “Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman,” countercharges against French, and, ultimately, Jackson’s departure from active service. Jackson’s brother-in-law, Daniel Harvey Hill, later hinted that the eventual result came only after Jackson spurned personal attempts by another officer, William Whann Mackall, to arrange some informal, yet mutually agreeable, settlement.⁵

The second account involved a friendship made, rather than one broken, in south Florida. John M. Schofield, writing late in life about the last days of the Civil War, noted, “With the glad tidings from Virginia that peace was near, there came to me in North Carolina the report that Lieutenant-General A. P. Hill had been killed in the last battle at Petersburg.” Still feeling the pain many years after the event, Schofield added: “A keen pang shot through my heart, for he had not ceased to be esteemed as my kind friend and brother, though for four years numbered among the public enemy. His sense of duty, so false in my judgement, I yet knew to be sincere, because I knew the man. I wish all my fellow-citizens, North and South, East and West, could know each other as well as I knew A. P. Hill.”⁶

Members of the pre-Civil War officer corps easily could know many of their colleagues well, as did John Schofield and Powell Hill. On the eve of the war (December 1860), the actual strength of the army totaled 1,108 officers and 15,259 men. Eleven years previously, at the height of the 1849 Florida Indian scare, the military establishment encompassed a combined total of 10,585, only 945 of whom were officers. Of that number – as of November 28, 1849 – 150 officers and 1,591 men were “employed, in suppressing Indian hostilities in Florida.” Among those officers were George Gordon Meade, John Clifford Pemberton, and Ambrose Powell Hill.⁷

The chain of events that brought Meade, Pemberton, and Hill to Florida was set off by two rogue attacks of a small party of renegade Indians. The first occurred July 12, 1849, at Russell’s Landing on the Indian River, four miles north of Fort Pierce on the Atlantic side of the peninsula. The second attack followed five days later at a recently opened Indian trading store on the Peace River near what is now Bowling Green, ninety miles west of Russell’s Landing and fifty miles southeast of Tampa. In the first instance, one man was killed and one wounded; in the second, two were killed and two wounded.⁸

The principal military installation then on the Florida peninsula was Fort Brooke near Tampa Bay. Its commander, Major William W. Morris, responded to news of the attack upon the Peace River Indian store by sending to the scene a detachment under Lieutenant John Gibbon. This officer reported back that he had encountered refugees at an Alafia-area homestead located half the distance to the Peace River and that they had confirmed the attack. Morris immediately notified his Washington superiors who, in turn, directed General David E. Twiggs to Tampa to take charge of the situation. Twiggs was given broad authority to suppress an Indian rebellion if such a rebellion, in fact, was at hand. Eight companies of artillery and the Seventh Infantry



Murder warrant issued in Hillsborough County, April 27, 1852, for the arrest of Oscan Tustenugget for the murders at Chokonikla in 1849.

Photograph courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.

Regiment were ordered to Florida under Twiggs's command. On September 12, ten more companies were withdrawn from Atlantic stations and sent to the state.⁹

Despite the wording of his orders and unknown to General Twiggs at the time, he did not have the final word on Indian affairs in Florida. Instead, that authority lay with Captain John Charles Casey, the Fort Brooke officer in charge of Indian affairs. As so often was – and is – the case in governmental and military life, Casey's power arose not from the chain of command but from personal relationships. Most prominent among those relationships in 1849 was his tie to President Zachary Taylor. The captain and the President had served together at Fort Brooke during the Second Seminole War, and from August 1847 to May 1848 Casey had acted as Major General Taylor's chief of commissariat in Mexico. There, if not before, Casey also had become friends with Taylor's son-in-law and future presidential assistant, Lieutenant Colonel William W. R. Bliss.¹⁰

For purposes of resolving the Indian scare short of war, Casey first invoked his informal authority on July 23, 1849, in a private letter to Bliss notifying him of the Florida situation. Taylor's son-in-law immediately showed the letter to the President and, on August 6, informed its author that Casey's suggestions had been favorably received. Bliss encouraged further

correspondence, and Casey accepted the offer. Specifically, on September 29 he again contacted Taylor through Bliss and urged the President to oppose any attempt to force Indian removal from Florida. Bliss responded in mid-October assuring Casey that Taylor agreed with his position. “The President seems very clear in the determination,” Bliss wrote, “that if the Indians comply with their obligations by surrendering the murderers, the question of removal is not to be forced upon their decision, that is they are not to have the alternative of removal or extermination.”¹¹

General Twiggs thus began his efforts in Florida without a clear knowledge of either his authority or his potential scope of action. The likelihood of Twiggs taking a rash action was slim in any event as he was a cautious man who himself believed in projecting power through the manipulation of individuals and relationships. “General Twiggs. . .,” his aide William W. Mackall recorded at the time, “is a chameleon[sic] – Social, political and military strictly following St. Pauls Command ‘be all things to all men.’” As will be seen, Twiggs’s success in that regard was mixed. John Pemberton felt kindly toward him, while George Meade and George H. Thomas felt themselves to be his enemies.¹²



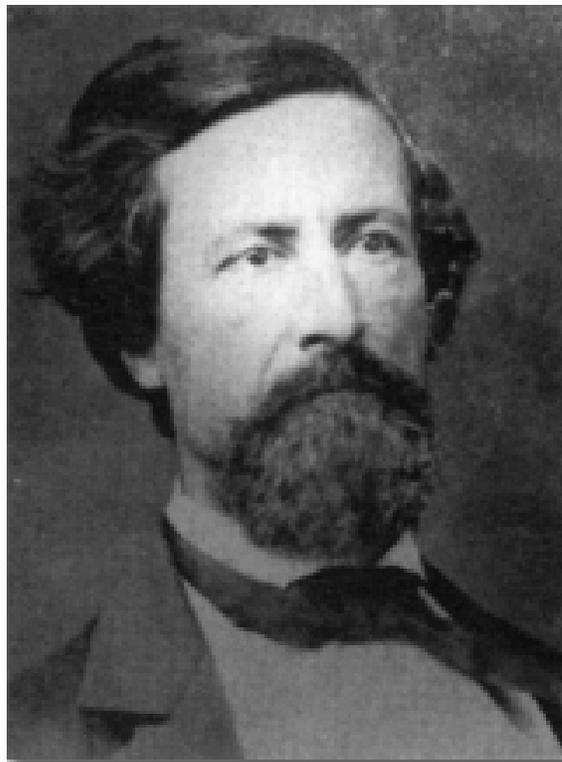
General David E. Twiggs.

Photograph from *The Military Heroes of the War with Mexico: With a Narrative of the War* (Philadelphia, 1849) by Charles J. Peterson.

The thirty-five-year-old Pemberton, who had been breveted a major two years previously for “Gallant and Meritorious Conduct” at the Battle of Molino del Rey, Mexico, actually preceded Twiggs to Tampa. He arrived there from Pensacola on August 17 with several companies of the Fourth Artillery. With him on board the steamer *Alabama* was his young Virginia-born wife, Martha “Pattie” Thompson, who was pregnant with their first child. The Pembertons’ arrival was none too auspicious. “We were wet thro’ by a torrent of rain in which we & another couple had been sitting in an open boat for nearly an hour,” Pattie informed her mother not long after. Fortunately for the new arrivals, the kindness of Major Morris’s wife made the commencement of their stay at Fort Brooke and the tiny village of Tampa more bearable. “On arriving here,” Mrs. Pemberton continued, “we were greeted by a note from the wife of the commanding officer, Mrs. Morris, begging us to come immediately to her house. . . . I was grateful & glad enough to find a shelter & a hearty welcome waiting us. We remained several days at Major Morris’, when the news of the coming of Gen. Twiggs & Staff caused us to seek other refuge, for this post being only large enough for the accommodation of the two companies already occupying it, it was by no means certain that Gen. Twiggs would not immediately seize upon Major Morris’ quarters.”¹³

Twiggs's arrival followed that of the Pembertons by one week. Among the entourage accompanying him were Major William Whann Mackall (at the time assistant adjutant general for the Western Division of the army), Colonel John L. Gardner, Captain Albion P. Howe, and Lieutenant Gustavus A. DeRussy. Whether Twiggs opted to oust Morris from his quarters is not known, but whatever accommodations the general found were sufficient to share with his protegee, Mackall. "General Twiggs has asked me to his mess and house," the major wrote his wife on August 26. "This [is] very kind of him," he continued "giving me also the use of his servants." The result clearly was to Mackall's liking for he added, "I pass my time here far more to my satisfaction that I did at Pascagoula."¹⁴

Mackall's satisfaction in life at Tampa was enhanced by the presence of his friend, Pemberton. The day of his arrival he noted, "The only lady I know here is Mrs. Pemberton." His pleasure in their company was conditioned, however, by a sympathy for the pregnant young wife and what she would have to endure at the isolated outpost. "If she has to be left here she will be lonely enough," he related to his own wife, "as her husband may be sent into the woods."¹⁵



John Clifford Pemberton.

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Pemberton's departure for the interior was not long in coming. On August 28 he left Tampa with a small detachment for the frontier homestead of Louis Lanier, located on the Alafia River about twenty miles southeast of Fort Brooke. Before departing he had moved Pattie into "a little cottage" that Captain and Mrs. George Washington Getty had offered to share with them. Despite the kindness of the Gettys, the separation was hard on Pattie. "I am grieving now over John's absence from me," she wrote her mother on September 3. Fortunately, Twiggs assisted the couple. "John has permission to visit me every *Saturday* [and] to return the following day," she reported but then added despairingly, "the ride is over bad roads, marked only by blazing the trees & I am almost unwilling to subject him so often to the fatigue."¹⁶

The detachment under Pemberton's command remained at Alafia until early October. Meanwhile, Twiggs and Casey, with the assistance of Mackall, Gibbon, and Major Gabriel J. Rains, attempted to negotiate a peaceful accommodation with Billy Bowlegs and other Indian leaders. As a result, Bowlegs agreed to hand over the perpetrators of the murders at Indian River and at Peace River. Shortly thereafter, Twiggs – apparently still unaware of Casey's correspondence with Colonel Bliss and President Taylor – determined upon a plan, "preparatory to a movement into the Indian country," to construct "a line of posts from the Manatee to the

Indian River.” The plan required an estimated regular-army force of 3,650 men, supplemented by 500 sailors and marines. Twiggs immediately set it in motion.¹⁷

Increasing numbers of regular-army troops arrived at Tampa in September and early October, including forces under the command of Major George Andrews, Captain Joseph Roberts, and Lieutenant Abner Doubleday. Despite efforts by many Floridians to portray the Indian scare as the beginnings of a general war, a number of the arriving officers believed the army’s presence was a waste of effort. Mrs. Pemberton reflected the sentiments of many when she wrote that the posting of troops along the frontier “was more to gratify the people than for any other purpose.” From the vantage point of a year’s service in the state, Major George H. Thomas came to a harsher conclusion. “This tour of duty,” he wrote his brother, “has been the most foolish and utterly useless of any that the Army has ever had to perform within the memory of the oldest officers.” Some individuals pitied the Indians. “These people,” wrote one young lieutenant, “have already-Heaven knows suffered injustice enough at our hands. My sympathies are warmly excited in their favor.”¹⁸

Other officers, far from sensing danger in their assignments, saw their presence in Florida as an opportunity to relax. Reflecting on the weather during one negotiating session held at Charlotte Harbor, Mackall wrote to his wife, “You can scarce fancy here in this latitude it can be so cool and pleasant.” Continuing, he expressed sentiments shared by many subsequent sojourners in Florida. “Since we have been here,” he wrote, “I have been sitting in the cabin in a cloth coat and I am just as comfortable as I would be in Virginia in May – if I only had my wife and children I would ask for nothing more in the way of comfort! One of the young officers is making some tumblers of lemonade one of which I will drink to your health.”¹⁹

Notwithstanding the relaxed attitude of many of the military’s officers and men, General Twiggs diligently pursued the construction of his cordon of posts from the Manatee River, on the Gulf side of the peninsula, to the Indian River on the Atlantic side. Essential to the plan was the construction of a road sufficient to support heavy military transport wagons during all seasons of the year. In south Florida, where a great deal of the land was swamp, marsh, or periodically flooded, the challenge of locating and building such a road certainly posed problems. To assist him Twiggs applied to the army’s Bureau of Topographical Engineers for a qualified officer. The bureau selected George Gordon Meade for the duty and ordered him to report to Twiggs in Tampa.²⁰

When assigned to Florida, George Meade was thirty-three years of age and married. He briefly had served in the army in 1835-1836. Six years later he reentered the service as a second lieutenant of topographical engineers, and in 1849 he held the rank of brevet first lieutenant. According to John Gibbon, who first met Meade in Florida, the latter’s Mexican War experience had been “in a subordinate position and without any special notice.” The lieutenant’s career needed a boost but, as his son later explained, “[Meade] did not anticipate a pleasant tour of duty” under Twiggs.²¹

The source of the friction between Twiggs and Meade is unclear, although it stemmed from their Mexican War service. Meade’s son recalled simply that his father “had served with [Twiggs] in the advance of General Taylor’s army from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande, in

1846, and owing to some unpleasant passages occurring at that time no good feeling existed between them.” Twiggs’s formality when Meade reported for duty in mid-October underscored the ill feelings. The general bluntly directed Meade to accompany Major Rains and a small detachment on a scout between the Manatee River and the headwaters of the Peace River and “to take such notes of the country as may be useful in your future reconnaissances.” Reportedly, Meade was allotted a detail of only two men and a mule.²²

Though Meade met with a cool reception from Twiggs, he found a warmer welcome with the Pembertons. The two Philadelphians were about the same age and had been together at West Point for several years in the early 1830s. Pemberton invited Meade, whom he characterized as “a nice fellow,” to share the quarters he and Pattie then were occupying. “While we were at Tampa Bay,” Pemberton recorded later that fall, “George Meade stayed with us for a week.” Somewhat

embarrassed by the spartan accommodations he had to offer, Pemberton added, “We were only able to give him a room & seat at our table, as our amount of furniture was very diminutive.” The accommodations, proved sufficient in any event, and Pemberton soon was feeling a great sympathy for his friend’s predicament. “George Meade is laying out roads, & writing reports I suppose,” the major noted in November, “when in reality he might just as well be in Spruce St., Phila, unless they intend to let *him* build bridges of other materials than pine trees in the rough, which is the highest point I think his duties can reach to here.”²³

Though his duties might be onerous, Meade assumed them on October 15 when he reported to Rains and set off on an eleven-day reconnaissance of the territory lying between Tampa and the site of the Indian store on the Peace River. His task was to find the best route for a road from Fort Brooke to a new post on the Manatee River (Fort Hamer), and from there to the site of the Indian store. Near the burned store, another position, Fort Chokonikla, was to be erected. The simple task turned into a far greater challenge, however, when Meade decided that a proper road could not be built in the area. The determination clearly lay at odds with Twiggs’s announced policy and necessitated an embarrassing relocation of the line of posts substantially to the north.²⁴

Meade’s anticipation of an unpleasant confrontation with Twiggs was eased by the personal support he enjoyed from certain of his superior officers. His friendship with Mackall was of long standing and could be counted upon. Perhaps more surprisingly for Meade, Major Rains came to



Holata Micco or Billy Bowlegs.

Photograph courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.

his assistance, noting in an official report that the lieutenant's work "entitles him to much credit for its accuracy, and the labor bestowed on its attainment." Captain Casey also easily accepted Meade's conclusions, recording in his diary for October 31, "This evg Lt. Meade returns with Maj. Rains – reports new road from Manatee to Ch Nikla to be 50 or more miles & bad road!"²⁵

General Twiggs proved not so easily convinced as Mackall, Rains, and Casey. He had staked his reputation on the line of posts and its success. Rumors circulating within the command suggested that the general's ambitions, buttressed by a major accomplishment in Florida, might propel him into a contest for the presidency with Taylor. As such, Twiggs intended to move cautiously. Rather than accept Meade's report, he ordered the lieutenant back into the field to take another look at essentially the same territory. His cold demeanor toward Meade had eased, however, as he began to

recognize his need for the man's engineering skills. Reportedly, Twiggs told acting adjutant W. T. H. Brooks after the interview: "Meade is doing good work and putting on no staff airs. Order the quartermaster to send him a proper outfit and make him comfortable." For the second reconnaissance Meade was provided with an escort of one noncommissioned officer and ten mounted men.²⁶

As Lieutenant Meade carried out his orders, General Twiggs shifted his base of operations – and the headquarters of the Western Division of the Army – from Fort Brooke to Fort Chokonikla. There, in mid-November, Meade again reported the inadequacy of the route from the Manatee to the Peace River.

This time Twiggs reacted positively and dispatched a detachment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Steptoe to scout the area of Zachary Taylor's 1837 Peace River supply depot, Fort Fraser, which lay slightly more than twenty miles north of Chokonikla (near present-day Bartow). With the assistance of Captain Getty and Lieutenant Darius Nash Couch, Steptoe quickly reconnoitered the vicinity of that post. He discovered that, due to flooding, the party could not venture to the east of Fraser even as far as the Kissimmee River.²⁷

Steptoe's report no doubt came as a great disappointment to Twiggs. His forces and supplies were concentrating at and near Fort Chokonikla, but he was no closer to finalizing the route of his military road and line of posts than he had been one month before. He turned again to Meade and ordered him to survey the country between Chokonikla and Fraser. The lieutenant complied



Captain George Gordon Meade, circa 1859.

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

and, in cooperation with Captain Seneca Simmons, laid out a wagon route between the two posts. Once again, though, Meade had bad news to report. On November 30 he informed the general, “The crossing place at Ft. Fraser over Pea River is bad.” Of the effort necessary to remedy the problem he added, “A considerable time must be consumed in the execution of this work.”²⁸

For almost two additional weeks Twiggs continued to believe that he could run his military road east of Fort Fraser – after all, Zachary Taylor had accomplished the same thing in 1837. By December 13, however, the general was willing to listen to a new suggestion from Meade, who had been spending some of his time interviewing Indian prisoners. They had informed him that the principal Indian ford over the Peace River lay nine miles north of Chokonikla near what, until its destruction by the Army in 1836, had been the Indian town of Talakchopco. Additionally, they told him that to the east of the ford lay “good ground there being no swamps or creeks of any size to prevent the construction of a good wagon road.” Meade had visited the site on November 28 and understood the importance of what the Indians had said.²⁹

Twiggs’s increasing respect for Meade and his urgent need for a suitable route across the peninsula sufficed to convince the general to accompany the lieutenant to scout the Indian ford. The party, which also included Casey, Couch and Mackall, left Chokonikla at 6 o’clock on the morning of December 13. By noon the group had examined the ford and its vicinity, and Twiggs had discovered that it offered exactly what he needed. Couch later recalled that, thereupon, “the General, much pleased, said, ‘Here shall be Fort Meade.’” Couch added, “Lieut. Meade, I know, up to that time had thought that the General was prejudiced against him.” Within days Twiggs had ordered the construction of Fort Meade and directed the lieutenant for whom it was named to run the line of the military road from there to the Atlantic. Meade’s escort was increased to fifty mounted men.³⁰

As the surveying party made its way from Fort Meade to Fort Pierce, John Pemberton recorded significant events in his own life. When Meade originally had left Tampa in mid-October, Pemberton had been ordered to the tiny settlement of Manatee, today known as Bradenton. He and the pregnant Pattie arrived by boat in a driving rainstorm. The discomfort of the occasion had an unpleasant impact on Pemberton, which he focused upon a group of slaves who watched their landing. “In a heavy rain,” he wrote, “[we landed] a part of the company in flats half filled with water – with a crowd of lazy plantation negroes, males and females gaping at us with eyes & mouth stretched to their ample capacity.”³¹

Pemberton’s mood was not improved when he found that the closest accommodations were two miles upriver from the village in the home of “a presbyterian minister, his wife[,] an amazing inquisitive child of 4 years, [and] a half idiotic servant woman.” Feeling deeply for his wife’s comfort he wrote his mother sarcastically, “This is charming, delightful for Pattie – no society – & the last settlement on the river – with the *chance* of a night’s repose being interrupted by Indian rifles, if they make up their minds to hostilities – our fare is of the pioneer & rustic order mixed – & house of log.” The crude nature of his surroundings did not lessen Pemberton’s appreciation for General Twiggs’s friendship, however. “Genl Twiggs kindly sent me here,” he later noted, “because Pattie is with me.”³²

The Pembertons spent almost two months together in the relatively tranquil Manatee settlement. “We are still domiciled in the most retired, quiet spot on Earth,” Pattie wrote in mid-December, “amusing ourselves with ‘the Spectator’ and divers very antiquated volumes.” John spent much of his time caring for his wife, rearranging his personal financial affairs, and also reminiscing about his Tampa visit with George Meade. As Pattie’s time of confinement grew closer, her health deteriorated. “I have been very poorly,” she informed John’s mother, “and tho’ have not the least appearance of any swelling in any part of my body, our physician deemed a copious bleeding necessary for me a week ago. Since then I am taking a very gentle tonic from him.” Fortunately, the kindly Mrs. Morris again offered hospitality to Pattie and invited her to Tampa for the final month of her pregnancy. General Twiggs allowed John a leave of absence to be with his wife at the time of the delivery.³³

The Pembertons’ first child was born in Tampa in January 1850. The proud father insisted to his own mother, “It is a lovely little thing the only pretty baby... of its age I have ever seen.” He had other good news, as well. “By the early part of February,” he related, “we expect to be on our way to St. Louis.” During his remaining weeks in Florida, Pemberton spent most of his time, other than what was required for his official duties, either with his wife and child or with his friends, Mackall and Thomas L. Ringgold. According to Mackall, many of their discussions centered “on the expense of families wives and children.” Reflecting on lighter matters, Mackall recorded in late January: “Ringgold & myself had this evening a good laugh on Pemberton. This morning for information I asked if any one could fully explain to me the difference between the philosophy of Bacon & that of Plato and the ancients – and particularly in what the philosophy of Bacon consisted. Pemberton quite glibly enlightened me on the subject matter! When I returned from hunting – I picked up McCauley and reading along found a sentence beginning thus, ‘The vulgar opinion in relation to Bacon may thus be stated.’ He went on to give us as this false & vulgar view exactly what P __ had stated to me in the morning. I had scarce finished before P __ came in. I read the section to him, and as you may well suppose we enjoyed a hearty laugh at his expense.”³⁴

All was not laughter for Pemberton at Tampa, however. The baby experienced “a good deal of choleric[sic],” and the major’s transfer was delayed. The latter development he blamed on General Winfield Scott. “I had been ordered to Jefferson Barracks & should have taken [Pattie] with me there,” he wrote on February 11, “but Genl. Scott, to favor a particular individual, has interfered to prevent it, & I shall continue in this country for the present.” Concerned about his wife and child, Pemberton added, “You will be surprised to learn that I am about to send Pattie to Norfolk! . . . She will leave here on the next boat for New Orleans.” His own departure was delayed until March 14. On that day he and Major Robert Selden Garnett finally sailed on the steamer, *Fashion*, for New Orleans with a party of Indians being transported to the west. Within six years he would return to Florida for service in the final of the three Seminole wars.³⁵

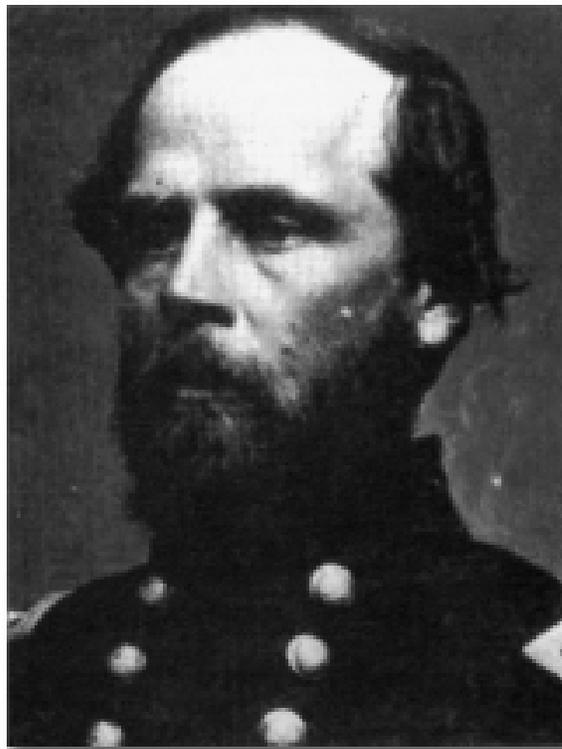
When John Pemberton departed Tampa on the *Fashion*, his friend George Meade had been gone from the state almost a month. The lieutenant had completed his duties in locating the line of General Twiggs’s military route and returned to Fort Meade by January 9, 1850. Conditions at the new, but increasingly busy, supply depot were hectic. Despite the activity, however, the mood of the officer corps was somber. The general’s talk with the Indians had proved “a complete failure,” and in addition Twiggs had learned that one of his daughters had contracted

yellow fever at Philadelphia. More ominous were anxieties about the fate of the Union. The debate over slavery in the new territories had heightened across the nation. One officer, William T. H. Brooks, wrote from Tampa at the time: “We are not a little anxious to know what is going to become of the Union and the Fanatics in Congress. The opinion is strong here, that this will be the last Congress. If such a calamity should befall the country, it will be a pleasant reflection to the crazed Abolitionists I hope that they have caused it. I hope when the throat cutting begins that theirs will be the first cut.”³⁶

Despite the gloom, personal matters had taken on a far rosier glow for Lieutenant Meade. His anticipated problems with Twiggs had evaporated as Meade had become indispensable to the general’s plans. In addition to having a supply depot and military outpost named in his honor, he had been given sole discretion for the siting of two other army positions. His career prospects thus enhanced, the lieutenant easily accomplished the remainder of his duties in Florida. He first accompanied a detachment, as will be seen, to begin construction of the two forts he had sited. In early February, he traveled with Captain Casey on a cruise from Tampa to Fort Myers for a meeting with several of the Seminole chiefs. Upon his return he received news of the birth of his son, Spencer, at Philadelphia and also learned from a thankful General Twiggs that he had been relieved. The lieutenant’s new posting was Philadelphia. The following year, though, Meade would return to Florida to construct a series of lighthouses. He remained in Florida – more often than not – until 1856.³⁷

One relationship shared by George Meade during his 1849-1850 Florida tour remains to be considered. Before leaving the state he made the acquaintance of a twenty-four-year-old second lieutenant named Ambrose Powell Hill. The encounter likely came at Fort Meade upon Meade’s arrival back from the Atlantic on January 9. Hill had been at the new fort, which he considered “a very pretty post,” since January 1. He had come to Florida the previous October from Baltimore but had spent his time until mid-December garrisoning outposts near present-day Orlando and Lake Tohopekaliga.³⁸

Neither George Meade nor Powell Hill left an account of their meeting or of the brief time they served together in January 1850. Hill, however, left a diary and several letters that preserve some of the details of his life during the time. From those materials the nature of their relationship and mutual experiences may be inferred. George Meade’s responsibility was to lead a detachment to the locations he had previously fixed for two forts. The first, Fort Clinch, lay sixteen miles east



Major General Darius Nash Couch.

Photograph courtesy of the National Archives,
Washington, D.C.

of Fort Meade while the second, Fort Arbuckle, was an additional fifteen miles closer to the Kissimmee River. The detachment also was to clear a road and erect necessary bridges and causeways. Lieutenant Hill, in his words, “had charge of the pioneer part.” As such, the two men worked together closely.³⁹

The detachment that included Hill and Meade left Fort Meade for the site of Fort Clinch early on January 11. Hill and his “pioneers” – and, presumably, engineer Meade – were in the vanguard. “As the command kept close upon my heels,” Hill recorded, “the men worked like beavers.” The day passed quickly, although the need to construct a causeway through “a boggy marsh” and the party’s approach to Bowlegs Creek limited its progress. While the work was hard, the day’s main source of irritation for Hill involved a theft. “Some scoundrel stole my whiskey from my wagon,” he noted, “while I was in advance. May it choke him, confound him!”⁴⁰

Beginning on the afternoon of the eleventh, Hill’s detachment erected a bridge of Meade’s design over Bowlegs Creek. “Constructed a bridge of palmettoes and pine brush,” Hill jotted in his diary, “on which after some considerable splashing of mud and miring of mules, crossed the train.” The movement of the train was complicated, however. “One wiseacre of a lead mule,” the lieutenant added, “thinking the smooth, deceptive surface more wholesome, ran off and led the team with him – he soon brought up all standing, rather all lying, and mired the wagon over the wheels – Hitched on two companies, and dragged it out – worked hard all day.”⁴¹

The following day, after bridging yet another swamp, the command arrived at the site of Fort Clinch (near modern Frostproof). Hill was pleased with Meade’s choice. “I find this Post (ours),” he wrote, “very delightfully located – A large fresh water lake in a crescent form, our camp being in the bend of the crescent, on a high pine ridge sloping to the waters edge. As this is to be my dwelling place for some time, shall endeavor to make myself as comfortable as limited means will allow.” He added, however, one note of caution. “Plenty of rattle snakes, who show considerable indignation at being disturbed in their right to undivided possession.”⁴²

On the day of the party’s arrival at Fort Clinch half the command was detached and proceeded on east to the site of Fort Arbuckle. Meade most probably accompanied the detachment to the second site and, thus, his short-lived first acquaintance with Hill was concluded. During the several days they had been together, however, each had had ample opportunity to take the measure of the other. Meade had displayed his engineering and command skills under difficult circumstances. Hill had shown a willingness to work, an aptitude for leading men under the constraint of urgent circumstances, and also a sense of humor in the face of it all. Each likely came away from the experience impressed with the abilities of the other.

As Meade eventually made his way back to Fort Meade and Tampa, Hill remained on station at Fort Clinch. The routine of garrison duty began to take its toll on his sense of humor. On May 15 he recorded, “Still at Fort Clinch and with no present prospect of leaving for U.S. – Have sometimes seen very hard service, scouting and then again had but little to do – The command mostly employed in constructing a road and bridges between this and Fort Meade.” About the same time he expressed to his father a disgust of the army’s efforts in the state. “We have already been in Florida eight months,” he wrote, “wintering it in tents, and the season for an active



The Peace River bridge at Fort Meade, as it looked about 1888. This was the site of the Indian Ford of Peace River and of the first Fort Meade.

Photograph courtesy of Vernon Peeples.

campaign allowed to pass in inactivity. The time which should have been devoted to forcing the Indians out, has been consumed in trying to talk them out, and the Indians as a matter of course have out-talked us, lying being the chief ingredient in their diplomacy. – They have gained time, gathered in all the crops, fortified their fastnesses, and now through the mouth of Billy Bowlegs, they tell 'wont go no how', and snap their fingers at us in derision."⁴³

Hill's dissatisfaction with the army prompted him to think of resigning. Writing of the possibilities of army resources being spread even more thinly, he informed his father, "I shall go home and maul rails – Ask Ma if she can spare me a bed & a seat at the table." When the possibility of secession appeared stronger during the summer, he became even more specific. "If the Union is dissolved," the second lieutenant informed his brother, Edward, "I shall make tracks for home, and offer my sword to the Governor [of Virginia], and intimate my modest desire for a brigade at least." As it turned out, he remained in the army, and he stayed in Florida.⁴⁴

Fort Clinch was abandoned June 8, 1850, and Hill was transferred to an outpost on the Alafia River, near the site of John Pemberton's assignment in October of the previous year. There he grew ill, a circumstance that may have prompted his transfer a few months later to Key West. The lieutenant stayed at Key West for over a year. After a tour of duty in Texas, he returned to Florida in 1852 and remained until recurrent illness prompted his departure for Virginia in 1855. Traveling with him to his home at Culpeper was Hill's Florida-found friend, John M. Schofield.⁴⁵

For a short time in the closing months of 1849 and the early months of 1850, as sectional crisis gripped the nation, the lives of a number of United States Army officers who soon were to become leaders of importance during the American Civil War were intertwined in frontier south Florida. The relationships and experiences shared on that frontier affected their lives and serve to illustrate the importance of such relationships in understanding those men and their later careers.



First Lieutenant Ambrose Powell Hill, circa 1859.

Photograph courtesy of the Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.



“Site of Old Fort Meade.” The L.A. Morgan home at Fort Meade was likely built as officers’ housing at the second Fort Meade.

Photograph courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Archives.

¹ Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1974), 106-08; Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Life of Henry Clay* (Boston, 1937), 394-413.

² For information on the Florida Indian scare of 1849-1850, see: Michael G. Schene, “Not a Shot Fired: Fort Chokonikla and the ‘Indian War’ of 1849-1850,” *Tequesta* 37 (1977): 19-37; James W. Covington, “Billy Bowlegs, Sam Jones, and the Crisis of 1849,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (January 1990): 299-311; Janet Snyder Matthews, *Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay 1528-1885* (Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1983), 181-203; and Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida’s Peace River Frontier*, (Orlando, 1991), 75-90.

³ As to the service of Meade, Johnston, Bragg, and Pemberton in the Second Seminole War, see: John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War 1835-1842* (Gainesville, Florida, 1967), 322. Meade, Pemberton, and the others mentioned in the text (though not Johnston and Bragg) served in south Florida in 1849-1850.

⁴ Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 267, 292-93, 321-27.

⁵ Frank E. Vandiver, *Mighty Stonewall* (New York, 1957), 56-70; Daniel H. Hill, “The Real Stonewall Jackson,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 47 (November 1893-April 1894): 624-25.

⁶ John M. Scholfield, *Forty-Six Years in the Army* (New York, 1897), 25-26.

⁷ Thomas H. S. Hamersly, *Complete Regular Army Register of the United States: For One Hundred Years, (1779-1879)* (Washington, D.C., 1880), 11, 213; Senate Executive Document No. 1, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 189.

⁸ Covington, “Billy Bowlegs,” 303-04.

⁹ Schene, “Not a Shot Fired,” 22-23; Senate Executive Document No. 1, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 183.

¹⁰ George Washington Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy... 1802-1890*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1891), I, 426-27. For Taylor's service during the Second Seminole War, see: Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 245-73. Casey's influence with Florida's Indians may have arisen from the time of his and Taylor's presence at Fort Brooke when, it was rumored, he had taken as a mistress the sister of the Seminole chief, Billy Bowlegs. Covington, "Billy Bowlegs," 304.

¹¹ W. W. R. Bliss to J. C. Casey, August 6, 1849 and October 16, 1849, John Charles Casey Papers, Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Taylor quoted in Brown, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 86.

¹² "Sketch of the life of General W. W. Mackall written by his wife in 1890," Manuscript Volume No. 4, 63, William Whann Mackall Papers, Southern Historical Collection; John C. Pemberton to Israel Pemberton, November 19, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; George Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 2 vols. (New York, 1913), I, 201; Wilbur D. Thomas, *General George H. Thomas: The Indomitable Warrior* (New York, 1964), 101. An additional manuscript copy of the "Sketch of the life of General W. W. Mackall" is in the collection of Henry C. Mackall, Fairfax, Virginia. Mackall in 1849 was counting on support for his career from the same friend as Casey was counting on for help with the Indian problem. "I am still in hopes," he wrote his wife on October 11, "that Gen'l Taylor (the President) will make Bliss his Gen'l, which will put me in a better position for permanency now, I feel almost confident he will do it." "Sketch of the Life of General W. W. Mackall," 71.

¹³ Patricia L. Faust, ed., *Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (New York, 1986), 569; Cullum, *Biographical Register*, I, 684; "Notes, 1849-1850," entry of August 17, 1849, Francis Collins Papers, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin; Mrs. John C. Pemberton to "Dear Mama," September 3, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers.

¹⁴ "Notes, 1849-1850," entry of August 24, 1849, Francis Collins Papers; William W. Mackall, *A Son's Recollections of His Father* (New York, 1930), 136.

¹⁵ Mackall, *A Son's Recollections*, 136.

¹⁶ "Notes, 1849-1850," entry of August 28, 1849, Francis Collins Papers; Mrs. John C. Pemberton to "Dear Mama," September 3, 1849, and John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, Pemberton Family Papers.

¹⁷ "Notes, 1849-1850," entries of September 6 and 15, 1849, Francis Collins Papers; Senate Executive Document No. 49, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 62; Schene, "Not a Shot Fired," 23-25; Senate Executive Document No. 1, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 126-28.

¹⁸ Senate Document No. 1, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 180-82; "Notes, 1849-1850," entries of September 13 and 16, 1849, and October 23, 1849, Francis Collins Papers; *Ocala Argus*, quoted in *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*, August 29 and September 12, 1849; *Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette*, September 17, 1849; Mrs. John C. Pemberton to "Dear Mama," September 3, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers; George H. Thomas to John W. Thomas, August 15, 1850, formerly in the Florida collection of Charles F. Meroni (xerographic copy in the possession of the author).

¹⁹ "Sketch of the Life of General W. W. Mackall," 68.

²⁰ Canter Brown, Jr., "Moving a Military Road," *South Florida History Magazine* 2 (Spring 1991): 8-9; Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 200.

²¹ Faust, *Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 482-83; Cullum, *Biographical Register*, I, 601; John Gibbon, *An Address on the Unveiling of the Statue of Major-General George G. Meade In Philadelphia, October 18th, 1887* (Philadelphia, 1887), 3; Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 201.

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- ²² Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 201; W. W. Mackall to G. Meade, October 15, 1849, George G. Meade Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- ²³ Faust, *Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 482, 569; John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, October 26, 1849, and John C. Pemberton to Israel Pemberton, November 19, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers.
- ²⁴ “Journal & Surveyors Notes 1849-1850,” entries of October 21 to 31, 1849, Meade Papers; John Charles Casey Diary, 1849, entry of October 31, Casey Papers, U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York; Brown, “Moving a Military Road,” 9-10.
- ²⁵ Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 201; Rains to Twiggs, November 6, 1849, record group 393, part 1, Western Division and Department, 1820-1854, Letters Received 1849, Box 3, National Archives; John Charles Casey Diary, 1849, entry of October 31, 1849, Casey Papers.
- ²⁶ New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, January 3, 1850; “Journal & Surveyors Notes 1849-1850,” entry of November 8, 1849, Meade Papers; Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 201; Orders No. 41, Headquarters Western Division, Tampa Bay, November 7, 1849, Meade Papers.
- ²⁷ “Notes, 1849-1850,” entry of November 225, 1849, Francis Collins Papers; “Journal & Surveyors Notes 1849-1850,” entry of November 16, 1849, Meade Papers; Steptoe to Brooks, Fort Chokonikla, November 22, 1849, record group 393, part 1, Western Division and Department, Letters Received 1849, Box 3, National Archives.
- ²⁸ Meade to Brooks, November 30, 1849, record group 393, part 1, Western Division and Department, Letters Received 1849, Box 3, National Archives.
- ²⁹ Meade to Mackall, December 13, 1849, Meade Papers.
- ³⁰ “Journal & Surveyors Notes 1849-1850,” entries of November 28 and December 13, 1849, Meade Papers; Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 202; M. F. Hetherington, *History of Polk County Florida* (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1928; reprint ed., Chuluota, Florida: Mickler House, 1971), 74; Mackall to Bainbridge, December 17, 1849, record group 393, part 1, 5th Military Department, Letters, Reports, and Orders Received and Other Records, Box 1, National Archives; Mackall to Meade, December 19, 1849, Meade Papers.
- ³¹ John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, October 26, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers.
- ³² *Ibid.*; John C. Pemberton to Israel Pemberton, November 19, 1849, Pemberton Papers. The Presbyterian minister was Edmund Lee of Vermont. Lee’s wife, Electa, also was from Vermont, although their daughter, Sarah, had been born in Florida. Southerner Pattie Pemberton did not take well to Mrs. Lee and wrote of her: “Our hostess is too much of a Yankee to please us, & words at table are the only exchanges of civility passing between us.” Manuscript returns, Seventh U.S. Decennial Census, Florida, Hillsborough County schedule 1 (population); Matthews, *Edge of Wilderness*, 214; Mrs. John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, December 12, 1849, Pemberton Family Papers.
- ³³ Mrs. John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, December 12, 1849, and John C. Pemberton to Israel Pemberton, November 19, 1849, Pemberton Papers.
- ³⁴ John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, January 21, 1850, Pemberton Family Papers; “Sketch of the Life of General W. W. Mackall,” 78-79.
- ³⁵ John C. Pemberton to Mrs. R. C. Pemberton, February 11, 1850, Pemberton Family Papers; “Notes 1849-1850,” entry of March 16, 1850, Francis Collins Papers; Cullum, *Biographical Register*, I, 684.
- ³⁶ Freeman Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 47; “Journal & Surveyors Notes 1849-1850,” entries of December 22, 1849 - January 9, 1850, Meade Papers; W. T. H. Brooks to [?], December 29, 1849, and Brooks to “Dear Brother,” December 31, 1849, William Thomas Harbaugh Brooks Papers, U. S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

³⁷ “Notes, 1849-1850,” entry of February 13, 1850, Francis Collins Papers; Meade, *Life and Letters*, I, 202-07; Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg*, 47-49.

³⁸ “Diary-December 13, 1849-May 15, 1850,” entries of December 13, 1849-January 9, 1850, Ambrose Powell Hill Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

³⁹ Bainbridge to Mackall, January 1, 1850, and Meade to Mackall, January 10, 1849 [1850], record group 393, part 1, Western Division and Department, 1820-1854, Letters Received, Box 4, National Archives; “Diary-December 13, 1849-May 15, 1850,” entries of January 10 and 11, 1850, Hill Papers.

⁴⁰ “Diary-December 13, 1849-May 15, 1850,” entry of January 11, 1850, Hill Papers.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, entry of January 12, 1850.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, entry of May 15, 1850; A. P. Hill to Thomas Hill, May 5, 1850, Hill Papers.

⁴⁴ A. P. Hill to Thomas Hill, May 5, 1850, and A. P. Hill to Edward Baptist Hill, August 16, 1850, Hill Papers.

⁴⁵ Hamersly, *Army Register*, II, 128; A. P. Hill to Edward Baptist Hill, August 16, 1850; James I Robertson, Jr., *General A. P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior* (New York: Random House, 1987), 22-25.