



WALTON

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Henry Marie Brackenridge Walton County Pioneer Judge

By
Sam Carnley

A Pennsylvanian by birth but a transient resident of Alaquá as a consequence of his duties as Superior Court Judge of the Territory of West Florida, Brackenridge built Walton County's first court house in Alaquá making it the site of the first County seat.

After leaving his native Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he was born 11 May 1786, he arrived in the Territory of West Florida in 1821 by way of Louisiana, St. Louis, Missouri, South Dakota and South America at which time he was thirty-five years of age. His accomplishments at that stage of his life included having become a lawyer, judge, journalist, author, explorer and diplomatic secretary to South America. In addition to his native language of English, he fluently spoke French, Spanish, German, Latin, Greek and Italian.¹

The extraordinary array of abilities he commanded did not go unnoticed by General Andrew Jackson whom Brackenridge met by chance on a Mississippi River boat. The United States had recently concluded a treaty with Spain ceding the Florida Territories to the U. S. and President James Monroe had commissioned Jackson to preside over the transfer scheduled to occur in Pensacola

between American and Spanish authorities. Brackenridge's proficiency in law and the Spanish language would help ease the challenges Jackson knew he faced in dealing with the Spaniards whom he perceived as arrogant and untrustworthy. After arriving in Pensacola and finding his pessimism of the Spaniards justified, Jackson rejoiced in his foresight at bringing Brackenridge along as a member of his entourage. In his ability to translate and grasp the nuances of their speech and behavior, Brackenridge anticipated the Spanish officials' every duplicitous move, staying always one step ahead of them. He did his job so well that Jackson appointed him Alcalde (mayor) of Pensacola and President Monroe appointed him judge over the Territory of West Florida, in which capacity he served from 1822 to 1832:

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Upcoming Reunions

The Reunions page is temporarily down for maintenance and updating. We hope to have it back up in the near future.

Walton County Heritage Museum

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
1140 Circle Drive, De Funiak Springs, FL 32435
850-951-2127

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/>

¹ Bruce A. Cosson, compiler, *Letters of Henry Marie Brackenridge*, (Privately published, DeFuniak Springs, Florida, undated). xxxvi

(Cont'd from page 1)

Henry Marie Brackenridge **Walton County Pioneer Judge**

By
Sam Carnley

Henry M. Brackenridge Esquire
Judge in and over that part of the
Territory, known as West Florida
Pensacola

Department of State

Washington 11th June 1822.

Sir,

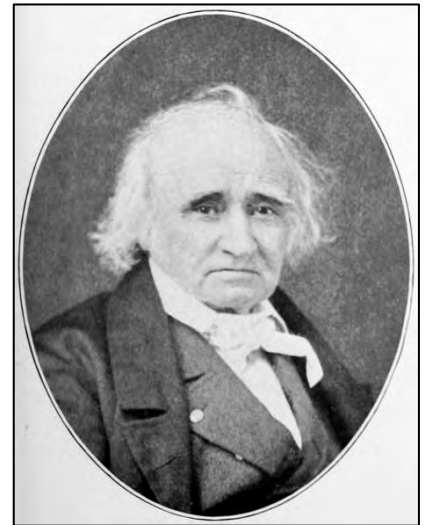
The President having appointed you judge in and over that part of the Territory of Florida, known as West Florida, I have the honour of forwarding herewith a Commission for your acceptance, the receipt of which you will be pleased to acknowledge, accompanied with an intimation, whether you accept it, or not. You will also receive enclosed a Commission appointing Benjamin Robertson, Marshal of the United State for that part of the Territory of Florida known as West Florida; and I have to request the favour of you to deliver it over to him in the event of your acceptance of the appointment of Judge, after he shall have given the Official Bond required by law, and complied with the usual forms in such cases: other wise to deliver it over to the Governor.

I am, Very Respectfully,

Sir,

Your Obed. ^t Serv. ^t

John Quincy Adams¹



Henry Marie Brackenridge (1786-1871). Photo courtesy of Percy Frazer Smith - Notable Men of Pittsburgh and Vicinity, Pittsburgh 1901. (archive.org), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8970013>

Always a prolific writer of letters, a vast number of which have been preserved, Brackenridge left a record of not only his philosophical, social, political and ethical views, but of his personal life as well. It is through those letters that much is known of his time spent in the Florida panhandle from Pensacola to Tallahassee and points in between including Alaqua. Numerous of his letters were addressed from those locations to his future and then present wife, Caroline Marie. She was the daughter of Jane Marie with whom Brackenridge lived for several years as a small child. He and Caroline were playmates and as young adults became increasingly fond of each other and eventually married, positioning him as a future beneficiary of a sizable fortune through the estate of his wife's family. Apparently, Henry had no middle name and as a gesture of respect and honor for her kindness to him as a child, took Jane Marie's last name as his middle name.

In possibly his first letter to Caroline from Pensacola dated July 20, 1825 the nature of his character begins to emerge. He chides her for writing that she had not received a letter from him in two years and again explains that in his last letter to her he clarified why she sometimes may not have received his letters although he wrote them timely. He cites numerous difficulties including a serious illness he had recently faced which may have caused him to delay in writing to her, but added:

¹ Bruce A. Cosson, compiler, *Letters of Henry Marie Brackenridge*, (Privately published, DeFuniak Springs, Florida, undated), 78

. . . Do not suppose, Caroline, that I am thus enumerating my misfortunes as an excuse to forget you. This can never be. During my recent illness everything relating to you and your unhappy mother, the cruelty of Ross, occupied almost my whole thoughts. . .²

Considering Pensacola an unhealthy place due to its history of Yellow Fever epidemics which killed hundreds of its residents, Brackenridge preferred not to live there. He made his home instead at a place he called Santa Rosa located in today's Santa Rosa County between Gulf Breeze and Navarre. It is now the site of the Naval Live Oaks Reservation which Brackenridge established and then turned over the U. S. government to preserve and manage. In a letter to Caroline datelined S^{ta}. Rosa, June 1st 1826 he describes his "little villa" as he called it:

. . . Your anxiety in what relates to me is not greater than mine respecting yourself. My constitution is a good one, although severely tried by exposure to heat and cold. My health is entirely recovered from the attack of last year, and I have little cause to fear as long as I can continue at home, instead of travelling through rivers, swamps and morasses, the seats of disease. Four years have passed away since my little villa on S^{ta}. Rosa sound was begun, and without boasting I can say it exhibits proof of industry. By looking at the map you can see where I live. It is the narrow point of land between the bay, and a long island of a few hundred yards wide, composed of sand, and which lies along the canal. My cottage fronts the ocean, with the exception of the island of S^t. Rosa, there is nothing to intercept the view. There is a clean sand beach before me, on which I often amuse myself walking barefoot. The heat of summer is scarcely known here, the breeze from the sea keeps the air always cool. There has been no instance of sickness since I came here. The situation is perhaps the handsomest in Florida, and perhaps the most healthy. All my earnings, and more, have been applied to render this spot a retreat for a hermit like myself, that is for one who is desirous to make up for the want, perhaps too the relish, for gay and polished society, by interesting objects of nature. The beautiful garden where I passed so many hours of my infancy, left a strong attachment to such scenes. My fig, and orange trees, and grapevines, are my companions and friends. My cabbages, peas, beans, lotuses, peppers, melons occupy my attention, when not forced away by other avocations. A cow affords me milk, my favorite food. Thus you may form some idea of the life I had, and you may suppose that it is not an ambitious one, when I assure you that a new brood of chickens is an event of prime importance to me. My household consists of a negro woman and black man, and an old coloured woman as housekeeper, with a little negro boy to see after the ducks and chickens, and bring a pitcher of water. I generally have also a white man to superintend while I am away, and at this time I amuse myself in instructing the son of a widow lady, a youth of seventeen who is preparing to enter the navy.³

Brackenridge acquired the property through a cash entry sale of public lands, which according to his patent, occurred 8/20/1834. In the above 1826 letter however, he stated he had been on the property for four years, indicating he entered the property about 1821, or thirteen years prior to receiving the patent. Although the county is given as Santa Rosa, it was originally Escambia because Santa Rosa County was not created until 1842. His patent simply identifies him as "Henry M. Brackenridge of Florida," with no county given. The property was described as 003s-029w which translates to Township 2 south, Range 29 west, Lot/Trct 5, section 4, containing 36 acres. (See map above right)⁴



His residence at Santa Rosa on the east side of Pensacola Bay while the City of Pensacola stood on the west side meant that his trips to the City required some means of water transportation across the Bay

² Ibid, 84

³ Ibid, 88

⁴ Brackenridge, Henry M., Santa Rosa County, Florida, Patent No. 3579, BLM-GLO, <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/>

as no bridges then spanned it. With Pensacola as the location of the Superior Court over which he presided he found it necessary to go there often and whether it was by ferry or private boat he never disclosed.

Other courts in his jurisdiction were located in Chipola (originally Webville which later became Marianna) in Jackson County, and Tallahassee. His letters to Caroline while in Florida were predominately datelined from one of the other of those places. His first from Alaquia was dated 1 March 1830. His means of travel between those sites was primarily by horseback and possibly stage coach or wagon. For trips to Tallahassee however, he had another option, which was to sail from Pensacola via the Gulf of Mexico to St. Marks and then travel overland to Tallahassee by the most readily available mode of transportation.

It was the overland modes he most dreaded for they took him through the "rivers, swamps and morasses, the seats of disease," he complained of in his 1826 letter to Caroline whom within the next year would become his wife.

In a letter to her written from Philadelphia dated Jan. 30th 1827 he addressed her as Miss Caroline Marie. By the following July he had returned to Pensacola and in a letter from there dated the 19th of the month he addressed her as Mrs. Caroline Brackenridge. He had married her in March of 1827 while on a trip to Philadelphia and brought her back to Pensacola with him. He soon however sent her back to Philadelphia over concerns of her contracting the Yellow Fever that had befallen others in the area. In August he writes her from Tallahassee, speaking fondly of the town:

Tallahassee 12th August 1827

My Dear Caroline

. . . I find this country much more congenial to me than Pensacola. Around this town there are miles of the most beautiful shady walks, where I can take exercise without fear of the sun. Instead of the sea breeze, a constant freshness is preserved in the air by the continuous forrest of oaks, while the earth is completely hid with verdure. The most beautiful parks you ever saw do not exceed the native groves. We have no moskitoes, and but few ants, in some places none at all. I always preferred this country to that about Pensacola, and its barren soil. For ;mother reason I give it the preference, and of which I was not aware; since my arrival I have not once felt the least inclined to be billious, while at Pensacola this was experienced every eight or ten days. This country would suit you infinitely better than Pensacola on account of its distance from the sea coast, if you should ever return again to Florida, but of this we shall talk more, if heaven should smile once more upon our fate. My health is wonderfully improved since my sojourn at this place, but I take constant exercise, walking five or six miles every morning, and frequently taking a cold bath at the cascade; the volume of water here is so great, and it is so cold that it resembles an electric shock. I am less corpulent, but the muscles are more firm and rigid. The cold bath in the morning, and constant exercise, particularly walking, is better calculated than any other means to strengthen the constitution. I rarely drink anything but water, not even malt liquor or wine; and you may rest assured it is best. Let me beseech you again my beloved Caroline to attend continually to your health-take the cold bath every morning, and as much exercise as you can especially by walking. Think what pleasure it will give me to hear of the improvement in your health. I have again been tempted to sell my place here, but have declined. There are now ten genteel and respectable families from a half a mile to two miles from the land, and several more are about to make improvements. For my part I could be happy here, if my Caroline could be reconciled. What we possess here we can truly call our own, not wrapped up in the delusive, deceitful contrivances of chicanery, which promises to us bread and gives us a stove. Let me enjoin it on you again, my dear wife, to make

it your sole and exclusive business to attend to your health. I wait with impatience to hear from you, in the meantime that Providence may watch over you is the prayer of your affectionate husband. adieu.⁵

Writing from Tallahassee again on August 28th, Brackenridge reveals surprising weather conditions for the time of year and a bit of gossip about the locals:

Tallahassee, Aug. 28h. 1827-

My dear wife-

Two mails have passed without any letter from you, which I ascribe to some mistake in [illegible place name] in forwarding them to this place. This is a severe disappointment. Your first, and the only, letter from you placed my mind much at ease, at the same time, like a taste of spirits to the drunkard, made me the more thirsty for another draught. Nothing very material has occurred since my last. I keep myself in constant motion, and enjoy excellent health. The weather has been very mild, the thermometer varying from "sixty-five in the morning, to eighty at noon; the nights have been always cool enough to sleep with a blanket. Tomorrow I set off for Chipola to hold court, and will be away two weeks, and shall write from that place. My stay has not been so agreeable in the house where I lodge, on account of some matrimonial quarrels, and miseries I have witnessed between mine host, an old Falstaff, and his young, *Indy*, wife, who married him in Virginia on account of his supposed riches. This will at some other time, form the subject of a letter which may amuse you, to me it afforded some useful reflections, at the same time that I could not but feel for the unhappy woman, who has thrown herself away upon a drunken, ferocious brute.

believe my dear wife, I must risk everything and go on, as soon as I can get through my business in this quarter; say November, and without returning to Pensacola, join you- in Philadelphia. It would perhaps be somewhat better for my interests here, to remain until Spring, but some sacrifice must be made, and this will not be very great.-Adieu-⁶

H. M. Brackenridge

Mr. C. M. Brackenridge
Care of Dr. Gebhard
No. 11 Race Street
Philadelphia

The following September finds him in Webbville, the predecessor of Marianna in Jackson County from where he writes to Caroline on the 8th with somber news from Pensacola and insight as to his intense dislike for the City. It also provides information on the Webb family of Jackson County:

Webbville, Sept. 8th. 1827-

My dear wife-

I have just received the most afflicting intelligence from Pensacola, it is the loss of my friends Overton and Sabina [Sebree] who have fallen victims to the dreadful scourge, the yellow fever. Although in some measure prepared for this, by the previous intelligence, the sad reality sinks deeply into my heart, and casts a gloom upon everything around me. Pensacola will henceforth be almost a deserted place to me. But God's will be done-let not these same lessons be lost upon us, but make us better for this world, and for the next-what are the worst ills we endure compared to those we see others suffering daily around us? There is every probability

⁵ Bruce A. Cosson, compiler, *Letters of Henry Marie Brackenridge*, (Privately published, DeFuniak Springs, Florida, undated). 104-105

⁶ Ibid, 109

that many others have fallen victims to the devouring plague; the mail passes through here tomorrow morning, and particulars will be then known, but no time will be allowed to write.

I reached this place on Monday and the court has continued in session, and will not adjourn until this day next week. My situation is very comfortable at the house of Mr. Webb. I do not recollect of having spoken of this gentleman; he is one of the most intimate friends I have in the country--Mrs. Webb is a most amiable woman of very plain manners. I am inclined to think you would be more pleased with her than any of the ladies, you saw at Pensacola. The news from that place fixes my determination not to return there this fall, but to proceed to Philadelphia, if it would please providence to continue me in health . . .

. . . But you blame yourself too much my dear wife- I am to blame too, and perhaps more than you. Everything was strange and new to you, and I saw with pain that the idea of your being doomed to live forever at Pensacola haunted you like a ghost. It was this which principally rendered me anxious to see you safely in Philadelphia, although torn from me-but as events have turned out your remaining here might have been fatal to us both . . .⁷

Back in Tallahassee on September 24, he writes again to Caroline telling her of his dejection from her recent letter and weather conditions during his time in Chipola from where he had just returned. He also sheds light on his annual salary along with news of more Yellow Fever victims:

My dear Caroline-

I arrived here yesterday from Chipola, and rode forty-five miles almost without stopping, and had in consequence a violent headache last night, but took the cold bath this morning, walked four or five miles and now feel as well as ever. Your two letters of the 17th and 29th of August, were the first I had received since I left this place for Chipola, and the last has sunk my spirits exceedingly. I had a presentiment of bad news, but I hope your illness was but slight. If I had been near to advise you, it would have been to have remained in Philadelphia, or to have gone to some place where health could not be doubtful. If M. Morgan's villa were in our Southern climate, I should pronounce it decidedly unhealthy, and in the heat of summer, it must be so anywhere. He, doubtless, thinks it perfectly healthy, but his is a partiality which is very natural. The period most to be dreaded is the month of September, I feel extremely uneasy for you. All the pleasure I should have experienced in hearing from you has been completely dashed by the account of your health, the mail arrives today and I shall look for something more cheering.

The weather during the two weeks I passed at Chipola, was excessively hot, the thermometer from 90' to 97- while here it was never higher than 90'. If the court house had not fortunately been situated in the midst of a thick Oak-grove, I should certainly have taken sick, for I felt quite unwell several times, but escaped without medicine except a few Seidlitz powders. The bath and exercise were wanting, and besides the situation is different from this; this is a valley, this is a high and broken country. After all if I had my choice I should quit this country forever, but a certainty of fifteen hundred a year in a very respectable station is not to be given up without serious consideration; yet the day so much desired, may come, provided we endeavor to make the best of our present lot. Within two days we have had a most delightful change of weather, we sleep under blankets and the mornings are cool and bracing; I consider the sickly season now, as at an end. The sickness at Pensacola has been dreadful, every account brings us the most alarming incidents. The place is ruined forever. Joseph Merrill wrote me that all the Americans who could get away have fled, that upwards of fifty are now down with the fever. The Wrights are all sick at the [illegible]. Mr. Gordon's and Col. Walter's family escaped before the fever commenced. That unfortunate man Williams arrived at Pensacola shortly after you left there-he came to St. Marks about two weeks ago with his son, and twelve

⁷ Ibid, 110

negroes of Col. White-his son died almost as soon as he landed, and Williams and six of the negroes are very sick, but it is supposed they will recover. They brought the disease with them, for there is no instance of any fever in this neighborhood, except some slight cases of chills & fevers. Col. White and Mrs. White had left Pensacola before the fever commenced, to proceed by land by Blount's Springs, the route which I had at one time proposed to travel with you. Mrs. White's health was very bad-it gives me pain to think that I cannot feel that interest in her welfare which I desire, but nothing can compensate the want of esteem. let us, however, be charitable, and not condemn . . . ⁸

Writing from Tallahassee on December 26, 1828 Brackenridge informs his wife that he has bought land in Alaqua and the letter reveals they have a son named Morgan:

. . . I have purchased a tract of beautiful land at Alaqua, about a day and a half journey from Sta. Rosa, which I have had in view for several years; it is very valuable, worth from 1.570\$ to two thousand dollars. I had purchased the pre-emptive rights of the settler and the profit was too great to be neglected. It is in the midst of a hilly, delightful country, settled, and likely to be settled, by a poor, but industrious white population; it abounds in fine streams, and springs, and at some future day will be a fortune. I gave five hundred dollars in cash for it. The experiments on the sugar cane have been entirely successful, and must raise the price of lands in a few years to a very great height. The Alaqua settlement is the first one on the road after leaving Sta. Rosa, and must necessarily connect with the establishment in Sta. Rosa. Although I do not expect any great immediate benefit, yet the opportunity was too valuable to be lost. A new county soon becomes an old one, and the advantages which a new county presents are soon over- I am no speculator, but a small sum judiciously invested under such circumstances produces an encrease [increase]which it is impossible to obtain in any other way. My lands near this place have encreased a thousand percent in value-and will encrease still more- I have now as much land as I wish here-but am determined to hold to the little I have.

My health is good-the court will sit next week. You need not write to me again at this place, as I shall go west immediately after- God bless you and our little Morgan-

Your affectionate husband

H. M. Brackenridge⁹

Again in Tallahassee in January 1829, he wrote from there on the 4th to Caroline advising that she should remain in Philadelphia until further notice and tells of his ideas for the house they planned for Allegheny and improvements at Alaqua. He wrote often of building a home on the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania where they would live after he left Florida, as he had no plans to live there permanently:

. . . On the most mature reflection I am satisfied that it is, according to our short sighted wisdom, most advisable that you remain where you are. The portion of my salary which will be appropriated next year for the buildings on the Allegheny, will be considerable, and on the score of prudent economy, it is best to pass the summer with as little expence as possible-not that it will be necessary that you should restrict yourself in anything, there will always be enough in the Bank, say three or four hundred dollars, for you to draw upon, a hundred dollars in each check. I shall expend the compensation I have rec and will receive on account of the live oak, which will probably end with this year, in improving my land at Alaqua. It is a very valuable tract of land--and I shall retain it, as a refuge against any thing that may happen here, at least, will *be a living*, in a high healthy country, as exempt from fevers as any part of the United States-

⁸ Ibid, 111-112

⁹ Ibid, 148

The plan of the house on the Allegheny, is very simple and perhaps common. It is a two story framed house, on a brick foundation four feet high, cellar under it, and a back building also, two stories, but not so high. One of the back rooms will serve for a kitchen until I shall build, a one story kitchen 25on a different plan. It will contain eight rooms. There will of course be closets. There will be a passage like Mr. Morgan's, with a room on each side, but they will be smaller--one of them will serve as an Office--the other will connect with a little back parlor adjoining the kitchen- The situation is beautiful, it will stand on a second bank about three hundred yards from the river, and about the same distance from the Canal. I think I mentioned to you that I purchased the little island for two hundred dollars, part of the amount, eighty dollars, was due by one of the tenants. Here is a spot at least, about which there is no dispute-it is not however so large as I expected it to be, not exceeding twenty acres, but these are amazingly rich, and it is very valuable for gardens and fruit trees- I paid the money while in Pittsburg. I will write to you again from Webbville or Pensacola. Take good care of yourself and do not deny yourself anything from an apprehension that our funds may not justify it. Remember me to my friends-and give little Morgan a kiss for me-¹⁰

Apparently his wife had dental issues because he wrote her from Pensacola on February 4th 1829 regarding the loss of her teeth and telling her of a possible remedy which seems crude in comparison to today's dental technology:

You speak of the loss of your teeth, it is a circumstance no doubt to be regretted but the inconvenience may be in some measure remedied. Mrs. Macomb of Tallahassee had three front teeth put in since the last time I had seen her; they were fastened with hickory plugs, and she had become so accustomed to them as to use them without difficulty. The operation is more painful in idea than in reality.¹¹

In a letter from Pensacola dated February 24, 1829 he again writes about Alaqua and his orange grove at Santa Rosa which escaped freeze damage from a an unusually cold winter. He also predicts that Alaqua will become a village in the future and that it is the second stage stop after Santa Rosa:

The five hundred dollars which I laid out in the purchase of the beautiful tract of land in the Parks of Alaqua, was very advantageously invested, and it is worth at least four times that amount, although it is not likely that I shall ever reside on it even if I remain in the Southern Country. It has delightful streams of water, surrounded by a high, hilly country, as healthy as the Alleghanies. It is the second stage [stop] after leaving Sta. Rosa, there will probably be a public, perhaps a village there- When I mentioned that I had got back to Santa Rosa, I was perhaps not sufficiently explicit. I have the letter of the Sec. of the Navy, informing me that it was unnecessary to obtain an act of Congress for a reconveyance of twenty acres, and the Orangery, as I might remain permanently in possession, and derive all the profits of my fruit trees-which is the next thing to a fee simple unless I wished to sell. The trees are now just beginning to grow-you will be surprised at the change which their growth has produced in the appearance of the place. In three or four years there will be at least five hundred bearing orange trees-and this will yield a profit superior to my salary. The winter has been unusually severe here-the poor birds have come to us in crowds from more northern regions, the redbird, cat, blue bird, yellow birds &c, so gentle that they will almost feed out of the hand. It must have been very severe with you; we have had ice three or four times this winter-once more than an

¹⁰ Ibid, 149

¹¹ Ibid, 152

inch thick, and a great deal of rain and windy weather. Mrs. Overton's little boy has been quite unwell, but is getting better. I wish you would write to her-

In another letter from Pensacola dated February 10, 1830 Brackenridge informs Caroline that workers were starting on the building of his house at Alaqua, the shell of which was to be constructed of hewn logs at a cost of \$150.00. He mentions the presence of a "fine spring over which I will erect a little milk house":

I arrived at St. Rosa a few days ago, without anything material as relates to myself. At Alaqua, I remained a few days, when they were raising up my house, which will cost me something more than I expected although only constructed of hewn logs. The original contract was 150\$ for the mere shell-but it will cost much more, for once begun I wished to make it a decent thing of Its kind. It is in a beautiful situation, on a hill as high as Mr. Morgan's, with more beautiful woods, and a **fine spring, over which I will erect a little milk house.** I have here about five hundred acres of excellent land; a more healthy situation is not to be found In the Alleganies. There are thirty or fifty families in the immediate neighborhood of decent orderly country people, who have no slaves, excepting one or two instances of house servants or assistants: the people labour in the fields as they do to the north, but are less industrious, because they can live with less labour. My intention was to expend on the improvement of this place, what has been allowed me for my services in the superintendence of the live oak, but it will exceed it. The estate is however a valuable one. The military road which is now finished leads to the door, and makes it a tavern stand. I shall lease the place to a young man, who has lived with me at different times, and who has always proved himself trustworthy-his name is James Evans. I sometimes think of the questions asked me by some of your quaker friends, whether sugar produced by white labour could be obtained in Florida? The settlement of Alaqua would be the very place for such a thing-the lands, with the exception of the tract I own, are in such small bodies, that it is unsuited to slave holders; but the inhabitants will be too poor to establish the *manufacture* of sugar although able to raise the cane in sufficient quantities to support an establishment. It would not be a wild prospect for some of the more wealthy to form a little company, divided into shares, employ an agent and, establish sugar work, on a respectable scale. The sugar made this winter is more beautiful than that of Louisiana. I have some notion of writing to George Peterson and submitting a project.

At Tallahassee I purchased a little covered waggon, and now employ a man to travel with me. With a small mattress I make the waggon my house, and take my night's lodging by the side of one of the delightful streams, for which this country is remarkable. We have had delightful weather, in fact it has been a perpetual spring-on my way here I gathered a number of beautiful flowers by the roadside. At Sta. Rosa, I found the roses in bloom, and the oranges hanging on the trees, had a most rich and striking appearance. It is a most brilliant sight-you would scarcely believe the size which they have attained since you saw them. The house has been plastered by Mr. Leavis, and a great variety of improvements have been made. I shall probably return shortly to Alaqua to complete the improvements I have commenced, and you may perhaps hear from me from that place, as it is a post office, like Webbville. I sold my land at Tallahassee for 1.200.\$, which settles all my debts due and demands, as far as I know them: the payments to be made in 1. 2. & 3 years. Alexander has written to me that all but *ten* of the lots of Tarentum were sold, and brought 2.230\$, which suffices for the debt due by the estate-he must settle the matter as well as he can. His very ingenious contrivance (the deed of trust) has puzzled other lawyers, let it now puzzle himself. The village in the meantime, will go on, and will be a pretty place, but I do not look for anything from it. The expence of building a house, must come out of my salary. I have already paid \$500. and feel no uneasiness about meeting the remainder: but it will cost two or three hundred dollars more than the contract, .in

consequence of some improvements I have suggested. I might have spared more, by not expending anything at Alaqua-but that place is all our own, and in the laws of fate, we know not but it may be home for us: at all events I do not wish ever to part with it If I can help it. I shall have enough, however, to fix our little farm on the Allegheny, for our own residence, snugly, and comfortably-stock it with everything necessary, furnish our house, and have a little to spare- but we must not be too impatient-everything cannot be done at once- The year '31, should it please the will of providence, I look to as the period of my finally quitting this country. Then the leases, for improvement will expire, then we shall have a home and a little income until then it would be imprudent to take any step which might ruin our hopes of peace and quietude for our remaining life. I have reflected over and over the course to be pursued next summer-my wishes continually tempt me to give up everything, to abandon everything-and fly to you-but my sober judgment continually brings me back. The separation has already been long and painful, but I hope it will be the last. Our dear little boy, who is everything to us, must not be exposed, otherwise I would wish you to come to Pittsburgh and thence to this place, next Spring-for it will be out of my power to quit this county next summer. You must defer it until the Fall-his teething, and the complaints attendant on it, render it necessary that you should continue where you are-or pass your summer in the country, as your own judgment shall direct. The consideration of expence is also to be present-this year, my buildings, will occasion a heavy expence-and it is better to deny ourselves for one year, than renounce our properties for the next. You need not suppose that this remark renders it necessary that you should deny, or restrict yourself in anything- I have made ample provisions for that-¹²

Brackenridge's first letter from Alaqua was written 1 March 1830 in which he lauds Alaqua even more highly than Santa Rosa. He writes that in addition to a home for himself, it may also serve as a public house - post office, stage stop, and tavern, not to mention a county courthouse, which indeed it became. He further writes that he has been occupied in building a road and two bridges - on Alaqua and Jones Creeks, and that the one on Alaqua Creek is visible from the door of his house:

Alaqua 1 March 1830-

My dear wife-

In my last from Pensacola, I informed you that you might expect a letter from me at this place. Employment is necessary both to my health and spirits, and here I have had ample opportunity, and never enjoyed better health than I did in this hilly country of fine water and pure air. I feel much better here than at Sta. Rosa, although by everyone else the latter is preferred. I have five hundred acres of most excellent land, for this county at least, judging from the lofty oaks and beech which grown upon it. I do not intend to cultivate anything myself, I have two tenants who pay themselves out of the produce for the clearing and improvements they make. But I have gone to more expence than was necessary in building my house of *hewn* logs-possibly-I hope only possibly, it may be necessary to look to it as a home and yet there is another possibility which also enters into my inducements to make it comfortable-you may yet see it, as you certainly will if you ever come to Pensacola. At all events it will be a stand for a publick house, and therefore ought to be a little better than a common log house..

My time has also been much employed in **building two bridges, and cutting a road**. The unexpended balance, about 140\$, of the money appropriated for cutting the road from Santa Rosa to this Post Office, was placed in my hands to be expended. **The road passes by the door, and the two bridges, one over the Alaqua, and the other over Jones' Creek, are both on my land. That of Alaqua, is in sight of the door, at the foot of the hill,-or rather it would be if the intervening beeches and magnolias, were cut**

¹² Ibid, 167-169

away. The sum you may readily suppose is inadequate, but the neighbors assent me, and I contributed something out of my own pocket. I endeavor to encounter all these expences, by spending little, or nothing on myself. I am busy from morning until night, and nothing but my anxiety to hear from you would force me away from this before the first of April. I think I mentioned to you that the time for holding the court has been changed to the first Monday in June. This will render it impossible for me to leave the county unless I resigned, and for this I am not prepared. The house will not be completed on the Allegheny until next January-the leases will not be out until then. In the meantime I wish to create a little home at this place, to which I can hold like a plank when I cast away my present hold. After I effect this object, I will devote all my disposable means to the improvement of the Allegheny property. My salary at present is considerable- I wish to make the best of it while it lasts. I do not think it safe to let it go until it affords us the means of placing the Allegheny lands, in a situation to be productive, and to supply us decently and comfortably.

I feel a desire that you should see this country before we quit it-to pass at least a winter. The winter that is just passed, has been a most delightful one-it was in fact a continual spring. Perhaps you may venture out next Fall-the crossing the mountains is the worst- You have great courage and fortitude in encountering those sufferings and dangers, with which you are acquainted; but not to meet those which are the creatures of the imagination, and which are represented to your mind as existing in those scenes with which you are not familiar. Men, are pretty much alike everywhere-and the bounty, and the protecting hand of providence, is not limited by degrees of latitude and longitude-

I hope our dear little boy is well-give him a kiss for me- Remember me to Mrs. Morgan and all our friends-

Your affectionate husband
HM Brackenridge¹³

Writing again from Alaqua on March 18th, he tells Caroline something about the families living there, contrasting them from "White Indians" who once occupied the Allegheny:

There are about thirty families here, and about twice that number in the next settlement. They are much like the people in Allegheny-although not like the White indians, who occupied the Allegheny lands two years ago they are quite equal to the more decent sort of country people anywhere.- I shall leave this in about a week or ten days for Pensacola-¹⁴

In a letter from Pensacola written May 2, 1830 Brackenridge tells Caroline the places and dates he will be holding court. Included is Alaqua, and the session scheduled for there would be the first one held in its recently built courthouse:

Next Monday the court sits here-(1 Monday in May) then at Alaqua, the 1st Monday in June-- then at Marianna, (Chipola.) the second Monday- I shall start about the 20th in my little wagon, and will have a resting place at my our house at Alaqua, halfway to Chipola, where I shall have plenty of good milk, and no mosquitoes.¹⁵

From Alaqua on the following June 9th he writes Caroline commenting on her plans to go to the country during the summer while nursing their child and that he believes the country is healthier than town for them both. He informs her that court has just ended, it being the first court held in the county [Walton] and was held at "Alaqua House.":

Alaqua June 9th 1830-

¹³ Ibid, 170-171

¹⁴ Ibid, 172

¹⁵ Ibid, 175

My dear wife--

I received your letter of the 11th. of May, in which you mention that you were about to go into the country with Morgan for a few weeks, presumedly on account of the whooping cough which is next door. I am glad you are about to go into the country-you know I am greatly in favor of open air such. _as we may find in the country. My first thoughts when I rise in the morning, are of you, and my dear little boy, and the last when I ly down at night. As you have determined to nurse him during the summer, pass your time a good deal out of town, in some healthy situation, and on a nutritious diet, and strengthening, for I fear it will weaken you very much. How anxious I am to hear his little prattle, and see his restless motions. My own health thank heaven is good-my little waggon is a great friend to me--but I am obliged carefully to avoid the sun-the least exposure to It affects my head. The court is just over here--it was held at "Alaqua house." This is the lofty name given to my "good hall" my, "good hall," (commas in MS) of noble pine logs. It was the first court in this county-and continued only two days- Today I proceed to Marianna, (Jackson County) where the court is now held instead of Webbville-- Thence I mean to go to Talahassee before I return to Pensacola-

I will write to you more particularly hereafter on the subject of your journey. I do not expect you will leave Philadelphia before the first of October-my quarter salary will be due on that day-and I will so arrange it as to have at least four hundred dollars at your disposal in the Bank after that day- You are right in not burthening with any articles of furniture, as which may be forwarded across the mountains-

I feel very much for the situation of Mr._ Gill- I hope to heaven that she may still recover- A change of place, and air may affect much-

This is a very pleasant place although yet quite in the woods-there are no moskitoes, yellow flies, or ants- it is high and airy, and has the most delightful water- The house is shaded by tall oaks, and where the hill begins to descend, there is a fine spring, which passes through a little milk house-Bread and milk, constitute almost my only food, and of these we have plenty-! believe it to be as healthy a situation as any in the world- In summer it is much more pleasant than the coast, although in winter it is less cheerful, on account of the want of evergreens- the white oaks and beech tree, are now clothed with leaves, and make a deep shade.

Your affectionate husband

H. M. Brackenridge

Post me the seeds of all kinds of fruits-currants-cherries, gooseberries, plums, grapes, &c &c- they will be of use to others if not to us-I regretted having neglected doing so.-¹⁶

Writing from Alaqua December 1st 1830 he informs his wife the cost of his improvements at Alaqua are paid for but incomplete:

My expences of this place, are now drawn to a close- the improvements are such as to enable the establishment to go on of itself- Mr. Evans, the young man who has lived with me at different times since I came to Florida, is settled in the house, he is lately married, he is a worthy industrious young man, and his wife although young and inexperienced, is desirous to learn, and to do her duty. The court is held in the center building, he lives in the south wing, and I occupy the north wing. The building is large, and roomy, although built only of hewn logs, and yet unfinished, but he must do that by degrees.

Your affectionate husband-

H M Brackenridge¹⁷

As of December 27, 1830 he is in Tallahassee and in writing to his wife he tells her that there is now a stage once a week from Santa Rosa to Alaqua:

¹⁶ Ibid, 178

¹⁷ Ibid, 191

There is now a stage once a week from Santa Rosa to Alaqua, and I am certain that my health during the Summer will be good if I only keep out of Pensacola. Alaqua I think as healthy as the mountains. But we must leave these matters to the future. It will not do to resign my office, until everything can be made comfortable on the Allegheny. We want furniture, out buildings, gardens, and a few hundred dollars to live upon the first year. It would be censurable in me to hold my commission any--considerable length--of- time after leaving the county-

I am extremely impatient to be off, and to hurry rapidly to Washington. I thought at one time that it would be better to postpone it, and then pass the summer to the North, but I find that this will be attended with serious difficulty. My health is now good, but we have had some uncommonly cold weather of late- Embrace our little boy for me, and tell him his papa will come soon-

Your affectionate husband
HM Brackenridge¹⁸

The letter of February 26, 1832 from Pensacola would be Brackenridge's last from Florida. He advises that he received the Doctor's letter announcing the birth of a baby daughter named Cornelia Jane. He adds that he will shortly depart for home:

Pensacola Feb: 26: 1832

My dear wife-

I have just arrived here; and have received the Dr's letter, announcing the birth of our little Cornelia Jane, which is to be her name, and I hope she may be spared to be a comfort to us- Dr. Hutchins, told me he had a letter from his wife some days later than the Dr. in which he said you were doing well-may God restore you, preserve you until we meet again. My health has suffered considerably this winter; after a severe attack of influenza, I was detained a week at Marianna by a bilious fever- I am now getting better, much much reduced. I must quit this climate while I have yet stamina of constitution remaining. This is the second bilious attack in the course of the year. The first in July, was a chill and fever every other day, which I found gave great difficulty to recover from, even more so than from violent inflammatory attacks. The second one came, on also every other day, but I had only then chills-took tartar, and calomel in abundance- I took certain remedies then on my first attack, and I think it has removed the slight affliction of the liver for which I was beginning to feel some uneasiness-

I shall sail in about a week for New Orleans, to take passage up the river- I hope about the middle of April, to be with you, if it shall please the almighty- I think seriously of quitting the courts finally-and endeavoring to do something in my profession at Pittsburgh, or that neighborhood, where I cannot work harder, and certainly will not be more exposed-

Give my respects to the Dr. and all the family, and believe me affectionately,

Your husband-
H M Brackenridge¹⁹

Writing from Louisville, Kentucky on March 26, 1832 Brackenridge informs his wife of a rather abrupt change in his circumstances. He had been notified that then president Andrew Jackson had nominated someone to replace him as judge in Florida, thus bringing his term in that post to an end, and he was headed home for good:

Louisville, March 26h, 1832-

My dear wife-

¹⁸ Ibid, 192

¹⁹ Ibid, 216

I have had a long voyage to this place in consequence of the high waters, and an accident to the water wheel of the boat. I had hoped to have heard from you, but I trust you and our dear little ones are well, and most sincerely pray that it may please Providence to bring us together before long.

I did not inform you before I left Pensacola, that I had just received a letter from Col. White' stating that General Jackson had nominated a Mr. Biddle, formerly a broken merchant of Philadelphia, and of no repute, and no lawyer, to succeed me after the expiration of my term of office. I think it probable I should not have wished to return-but the bad faith of General Jackson, after his solemn promise, shocked me. It is said the merit of Biddle lies in having paid the first visit to Mrs. Eaton, and having given her a large tea party. It is a pleasing reflection, that as soon as doubts were expressed of my reappointment, memorials were circulated, and signed by almost *every inhabitant* of the district in my favor. Great dissatisfaction has been expressed by the People, and on leaving there I rec. an expression of respect and esteem from them, which few individuals have obtained, after discharging such an office. They say I have the good wishes of every honest man--and they now unanimously recognize me as a publick and private benefactor. These are consoling reflections.

As misfortunes do not come singly, the great flood, such as never occurred since the first settlement of the Ohio, has no doubt done considerable injury on the Allegheny, as to prices, but it will perhaps make amends by restoring the lands, which were beginning to fail. I have not heard the extent of the injury-it could not injure the house, and but for the fences, would be a benefit. The Canal, will be useless again this summer, which is very discouraging.

I have authorized Mr. Ahrens to sell my Alaqua land to the best advantage. We may stand in need of the money- I shall never go there again-and it may as well be sold. Thus misfortunes follow each other- but if I can only meet you and our little ones in health I shall be happy, and smile at the powers of fortune-misfortune follow each other. Nicholas, the coloured man with me. He is a faithful creature-but has a poor head-he will be useful. I shall leave him at the Allegheny, to enclose the yard etc. etc. I am blessed with good health and feel able to encounter much labour-in fact my disposition forbids me to remain inactive. Half the exposure and toil I have endured at Florida, ought to serve me a living in a better country. What future plans, I may adopt, must be left to our initial consultation. In the meantime may Providence watch over and preserve you-

Your affectionate husband
H M Brackenridge²⁰

"Brackenridge returned to Pennsylvania in 1832 and became owner of a large tract of land upon which he founded the town of Tarentum, 22 miles northeast of Pittsburgh on the Allegheny River. The adjacent Allegheny County borough of Brackenridge is named for him. He was elected as a Whig to the 26th United States Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Richard Biddle and served from October 13, 1840, to March 3, 1841. He was an unsuccessful candidate for renomination in 1840. At age 85, he died in Pittsburgh on January 18, 1871 and is buried at Prospect Cemetery, Brackenridge, Pennsylvania"²¹

His former land in Alaqua changed owners a number of times and ultimately became in total or in part the property of members of the Cosson family of Alaqua. Bruce Cosson, an Alaqua native, is among the owners and also an avid amateur historian of that part of Walton County. He has studied Brackenridge and his Alaqua property for many years in an effort to locate the sites of the log house, the milk house and bridges Brackenridge described in his letters. After many years of searching Bruce has succeeded in finding where those structures stood on the property. Nothing remains of the log house but remnants of the milk house and bridge across Alaqua Creek are still in evidence as of 2019,

²⁰ Ibid, 218

²¹ Henry Marie Brackenridge, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Marie_Brackenridge

almost 190 years after Brackenridge built them. The remnants or, their locations, can be seen in the following photos. Bruce, and his friend, Don Perring of Crestview are metal detecting hobbyist and used their metal detectors to search for historical artifacts at the sites. A display of artifacts they found is included in the photos. (Photos by Sam and Nell Carnley)



Figure 1. Bruce Cosson and Don Perring, metal detecting partners.



Figure 2. Brackenridge milk house foundation beam showing notch in left end.



Figure 3. Bruce sits beside spring flowing into milk house foundation.



Figure 4. Bruce at milk house site on the edge of 30 ft. high soap stone bluff with spring water cascading down its face.



Figure 5. Bruce points to location of Brackenridge era bridge across Alaqua Creek.



Figure 6. Imprint of old wagon road leading from Brackenridge era Alaqua Creek bridge.



Figure 7. Bruce standing on site of Brackenridge cabin in Alaqua which served as first Walton County courthouse.



Figure 8. Artifacts Bruce and Don found with metal detectors and unearthed at Brackenridge cabin site.