

A Letter by Dr. Henry Perrine

Under headlines, "Written in 1840" and "An Interesting Letter from Indian Key by Dr. Perrine," the following appeared in the *Miami Metropolis*, May 4, 1900:

By the courtesy of Mr. Henry E. Perrine the *Metropolis* is enabled to publish the following letter written by his father, Henry Perrine, only three weeks before the massacre at Indian Key. This letter is exceedingly interesting from a local and from a historical point of view. The elder Perrine was an enthusiast in regard to the possibilities of South Florida, and, no doubt if he had lived, its development and growth would not have been delayed for over half a century. Mr. Perrine says that: "Boy as I was, I well remember the silk worms and their cocoons which were produced under my mother's care. Many of the cocoons attached to specimens of the sea feather were sent, after destroying their vitality by heat, to the Patent office in Washington, where they were placed, with many specimens of valuable woods and other productions of South Florida, in a glass case, all of which were destroyed by a fire which occurred in that office some years later. You will notice by this letter that he had in view locating a little east of Cape Florida. [Editor's note: apparently an error and Cape Sable was intended.] He did not realize the overflow from the Everglades upon the prairies, and after his death a new location for us was made at the hunting grounds by our then agent." Here is the letter, which is numbered 2:

Indian Key, S. F.,
17th July, 1840

Dr. Ralph Glover,
No. 2, Ann Street, New York.

Dear Sir: — Without an answer to my No. 1 of the 18th, ulto., I again address you. Mr. Somarindyck will be the bearer of this letter, and he will communicate to you many circumstances of great

importance for the speedy settlement of the Florida Keys, and the subsequent expulsion of the Murderous Savages. First and foremost I wish to encourage the private school first established by the native Bahamans at Key Vacas. The editor of the *Cultivator* at Albany advertises a deduction of thirty-three and a third percent on the subscription price of ten copies taken for schools. The agent for the *Cultivator* in your city I believe is an officer of the American Institute. At all events you can easily execute the commission of paying \$6.66 $\frac{2}{3}$ for ten copies of the *Cultivator* during the year 1840. The back numbers can all be enclosed in one package and transmitted to Mr. Howe by vessels via Charleston or Key West. The subsequent numbers should be sent as usual by mail, but directly to Chas. Howe, P.M., at Indian Key, for the Bahaman school at Key Vacas. The people of Key Vacas have petitioned for a post office at that village and H. L. Ellsworth, the Commissioner of the Patent Office, writes me that he shall endeavor to have [it] established as soon as possible. When the mail packet shall stop at Key vacas, then the *Cultivator* should be directed to the postmaster of Key Vacas for the Bahaman school.

As I sent you an order on Wm. Bard for ten dollars, with requests to expend two dollars for carboned paper and the *Female Advocate*, the balance of eight dollars will afford the \$6.66 $\frac{2}{3}$ for the copies of the *Cultivator*.

I see in the papers of the operations of the Daguerrotype and also of a process by which the pictures can be immediately reproduced as from a lithographic stone. For God's sake collect and transmit all the information you can get on these subjects both to my brother in Princeton and to me at Indian Key. Durant, the balloon man, or Chilton, the young chemist, will likely know everything already known on these subjects. Somarindyck's samples of silks, cocoons and silky cotton should excite much notice in the newspapers of the agricultural value of the Florida Keys. Drop a line to Durant and request him in my name to visit the samples and advise the best disposal of them for public purposes. Durant has always preached and published the only true doctrine concerning silk culture in the United States, and he will be greatly gratified by these ocular demonstrations of the superlative superiority of South Florida for the perpetual production of raw silk and of Silky Cotton!

I have six bushels of select seed of the best Sea Island Cotton for gratuitous distribution to all persons who will plant them the present year in South Florida. Three of the notables at Key Vacas have each commenced with a dozen plants of Manilla Mulberry, furnished by Mr. Howe, and with a pint of Sea Island cotton seeds

furnished by myself. I am also to advance money to all who will import for themselves the best plants from the Bahamas the present summer. By the by, you have seen that I have not even drawn one-sixth of the interest of my N.O. bonds due the 2nd May, 1839. I presume Bard has also received the interest due the 2nd May last. Now, although I fear I shall not be able to expend the interest this summer, yet hope for opportunities every month. I desire to ascertain at what price one bond could be now sold by Mr. Bard, the capital to remain in deposit with the previous interest. You understand what I want done better than I can express myself. I want say from a thousand to twelve hundred dollars constantly ready to be drawn in small sums at any moment when it will be most servicable to my operations here, the modus operandi I am not business man enough to explain.

18th. By the newspapers of New York I perceive that 30,000 *Multicaulus*, at auction in your city, could not be sold at twenty-five dollars for the whole, or at less that \$1 per 1,000 trees! Indeed, I am told they cannot even be given away in the northern cities for planting in the northern states; hence, now is the very time when they should be planted to the largest extent on the Florida Keys for bonafide silk culture in South Florida. The yankees, Goodyears, imported two great boxes of Manilla Mulberries, half of which are planted on their own improvements on West Metacumbie and the other half on Lignurd Veto.

On the advertising cover of the *Cultivator* you will see the means adopted by Mr. Howe and myself to excite the planting of as many acres as possible during the present year. The next island westward of West Metacombie is here called Long Key, on the charts Cayo Viboras or Vipers Key, and is in full sight of Indian Key. But you were not aware of the fact that there is a prairie of several hundred acres on the north side of Long Key. Housman intends to plant it this summer for his own benefit, but of course will not occupy it, if he undertakes the actual settlement on the mainland, either under his proffer to Congress or his contract with me. Now, I suggest for your consideration, the enterprise of planting the prairie with *Morus Multicaulus* and sweet potatoes this autumn by contract. Get any one of ten men to plant by the job one to ten acres each, even if you have to pay double the price of the actual labor. I am willing and anxious to get grown, even on public lands, any valuable plants at double the cost of the same labor in the northern states. Indeed, I am willing to give two acres of my grant for every acre on the public lands which shall be planted by any person for his own benefit during the present year on any island of the Florida Reef. The more information I acquire concerning my selected site

east of Cape Sable the better I am pleased with the location. The nearest hammock to the opening into the prairie is a beautiful grove of live oaks. The nearest woods to the eastward along the sea shore are celebrated among the Bahamans for the quality and quantity of wild cinnamon trees. You know they have long made money by shipping and selling the barks. Mr. Howe is also more and more gratified with our increasing knowledge of the additional advantages of the fortunate location, and before next mail I trust that we shall have growing in Everbloom Prairie a few plants of every kind known in the preparatory nursery on West Metacumbie. If Congress should adjourn without subserving the objects of the memorials of the actual residents of Dade county, I trust that such men as you will get up thousands of similar memorials in your city to be presented on the first day of next session. Nevertheless emigration to the Florida Keys should commence in October next, because the first settlers will have the best selections, and because their previous settlement will strengthen their claims to the most liberal compensation by Congress in the grant of lands. I hope that Professor Raffinesque and the Shaker Society have each adopted my advice to pray Congress to grant them each one Cape Sable, out of the three capes at the southwest extreme of the peninsula. Mr. Howe, myself and our children visited these three prairie capes the last week in April; we planted M.M. on the northwest cape and the Middle Cape or Cape of Royal Palms and obtained abundant fresh water by digging four feet within one hundred and fifty yards of the sea. The easternmost cape (where the fort was) is called by the Bahamans the Point of Main, and its projection affords the shelter against the westwards, which is the only wind that could raise a sea in the channel along the seashore of Everbloom Prairie. Six to seven feet of water extends through 12 to 15 miles of this eastern channel according to the Bahaman turlers, and one branch runs close along the prairie seashore. The Bahamans are hence highly delighted, because, say they, every man can have his own vessel come up to his own dwelling. But I find that my pen is running astray; suffice it to say that I shall be among the very first settlers on the south coast this very summer, and at the very latest period, next fall.

Whether Housman makes his settlement under a congressional act or under my session of 5,000 acres, the month after his settlement is established I can establish another settlement of native Bahamans alone.

Give us arms and ammunition, withdraw all U.S. troops from

South Florida and the actual residents of Key Vacas and Indian Key,
will suffice to protect settlements of small cultivation.

Very respectfully yours,

HENRY PERRINE