

**Andrew Jackson to Richard Keith Call, July 5, 1829,
from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by
John Spencer Bassett.**

TO BRIGADIER-GENERAL RICHARD K. CALL.1

1 This copy is in the handwriting of Maj. W. B. Lewis, who seems to have been particularly active in the Eaton affair.

Private

Washington, July 5, 1829.

My D'r Sir, Your letter of the 12th Ultimo has been rece'd. To that part relating to your journey to Cuba I have to refer you to mine in answer to your former letter. From it you will find that we have no wish you should endanger your health by proceeding to the Havana during the sickley season, unless the suits should be attempted to be brought on this Fall at St. Augustine. Whenever these suits shall be tried, it is believed by Mr. Wirt, as reported to me, that the documents and papers named in my former letter to you, are absolutely necessary for the safety of the U. States. To that letter you are refered for your government on this subject.

The other part of your letter, as you observe, refers to a very delicate subject; as such I always viewed it, and thought silence ought to have been observed by all justly app[r]eciating female character, or who had any regard for me; taking into consideration the circumstances with which I was surrounded at the time the communications were made to Dr Ely and Lady, who I know, had previously entertained a good opinion of both Major Eaton and his Lady, Dr Ely having in a note recommended the appointment of Major Eaton in the warmest terms. On Sunday they told me they intended to visit them the *next*

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day , and you can judge of my astonishment after Mr. Ely's having expressed the most favourable opinion of those two individuals, and his determination to visit them, when I received his letter from Philadelphia stating to me numerous base acts attributed to Mrs. Eaton which had been *confidentially* communicated to him, and in confirmation of these charges the declarations of my dear departed wife had been referred to, but which I knew she had never uttered. This brought from me a reply to Dr. Ely, such as truth and justice required and respect for the memory of my dear wife demanded, whose name had been so unjustly associated with a set of vile and secret slanders[r]s.

From the tenor of the Doctors letter to me as well as from other sources it was intimated that *some* of the information he had received from you, and believing that in all probability an investigation would take place, and if you were implicated in giving information to Mr. Ely it might lead to an exposure of your own declarations with respect to Mrs. Eaton, which you made to Major Lewis in 1824 shortly after our return to Tennessee. These declarations, made known to me by Major Lewis on my requesting him to inform me upon what grounds you rested your belief of the guilt of Mrs. Eaton, so far as he had heard you speak upon the subject, I did believe, would place you, in the discussion before the public, should one take place, in a very unpleasant situation. But you say you never made such declarations. Now my dear friend, what an unpleasant predicament this denial would place you in, if investigated; for you certainly did make to Mr. Lewis shortly after our return to Tennessee, substantially the following remarks—"that you and Mrs. Timberlake were one day alone, and believing that she and Major Eaton were *unwarrantably* intimate, and having no doubt but she was a woman of *easy virtue* , you made propositions to her of a certain description, which she with seeming indignation rejected etc etc", and you must recollect that from the day you and she had the quarrel, she never again appeared at our table and complained, as well as some other members of the family, that you had grossly insulted her. Knowing these things as I did and foreseeing the angry passions that might arise, I thought it my duty to bring them to your recollection. In doing this I thought you would be sensible of having injured your friend Major Eaton, and would have magnanimity and liberality enough

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to have informed Genl. Polk and Mr. Ely that the rumors of an angry correspondence, Timberlake having cut his throat from jealousy, dire[c]ting locks to be taken off doors at boarding houses in New York, and passing for man and wife etc etc, were all vile slanders so far as you knew or believed; and it was to give you correct information with regard to a part of these things that I sent you copies of two letters from Officers who sailed from this country with Mr. Timberlake and were with him until his eyes were closed in death.

Genl. you cannot regret more than I do that you assisted in giving currency to any reports about Major Eaton and his wife at the time you did.² That the hired slanderers of Mr. Clay should have attempted to

² Maj. Wm. B. Lewis, writing to Jackson July 2, 1829, said that General Call told him in the spring of 1824 that he, believing that Mrs. Timberlake was approachable and guilty of improper conduct with Eaton, had made advances himself which she rejected with "seeming indignation". Her resentment, he thought, was only affectation, "and did not change his previous opinion of her". Lewis added that, in 1824, he was convinced of Eaton's guilt by the rumors and wrote him a letter advising him to come home to Tennessee, but, hearing from Jackson that Eaton was about to leave Washington, he did not send the letter. A story derived from other sources represents Mrs. Timberlake as highly incensed at Call's approach and driving him from the room with the tongs. It goes on to relate that she appealed to Jackson, then in the house, to protect her from a renewal of such suggestions. See also Jackson's letter to Lewis, Sept. 10, 1829, p. 72, *post*.

destroy Major Eaton and through him to reach me, was neither astonishing or unexpected; but that my own personal and confidential friends should have aided in such an unhallowed work by lending their countena[n]ce to such unfounded falsehoods as were put in circulation about Mr. and Mrs. Eaton and when it was well know[n] too he was to form a M. of my C[abinet] I must confess that I was both astonished and mortified. But my dear Genl however much I may regret your course, on this occasion, you and I will not quarrel about it. You well know that we always differed about these slanders, circulated to the prejudice of Mrs. Timberlake now Mrs. Eaton. I have ever believed her a virtuous and

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much injured Lady—it appears you have thought differently, but as you have given me no evidence, entitled to any weight, in support of your opinion, I must be excused for still adhering to my own opinion.

Several letters have passed between Mr. Ely and myself upon this unpleasant subject. He caused the most minute enquiry to be made about the New York story, and in his letter of the 30th May last he says, “It gives me pleasure to inform you that I have ascertained to my satisfaction, that most of the reports against Mr. Eaton and Mrs. Timberlake, in relation to some board'g houses in New York *are untrue* ; and that nothing more than some imprudent familiarities could be asserted against them, and that perhaps by a Lady who may have been fastidious. Major Bradford of Phila. who made the enquiry at the request of Dr. Ely, informs me that the Lady who kept the boarding house referred to, told him the report was an unfounded falsehood, that no improper conduct had ever taken place in her house, and the only impropriety, as she conceived, was their travelling together in a steam boat from New York to Albany and back again, leaving Mr. T. who was indisposed; but who insisted on his wife's taking the trip. Major B. also informed me that the lady related a circumstance of Mr. Timbe[r]lake that did her much honor, and would do honor to *any wife* in any Country or age. Thus you see every charge, when investigated, vanishes; and I have no doubt but that the balance of the information given to Dr. Ely is equally unfounded, and if enquired into will be traced to *dead Doctors*, or *other nameless* persons. I will name another report put in circulation a few days ago. It is this—a short time ago Mr. Lewis McLane and his daughter visited this City. While here Miss McLane, with the approbation of her father, waited on Mrs. Eaton, but that on her return home studiously concealed it from her mother. Mr. and Mrs. McLane were in Washington for a few days, and as they passed through Baltimore Mrs. McLane for the first time learned that her daughter had called on Mrs. Eaton, and so great was the shock that she had well nigh fainted— *this is the story* . Mrs. Eaton must surely bear about her some unaccountable charm, for this same Mrs. McLane, who *fainted* at hearing her daughter *had visited* her, also called to see her while here; so also has Mrs. Rives. What a

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ridiculous attitude must the conduct of such ladies as these place those in, who think *they* are too *good* to visit Mrs. Eaton. I assure you sir, that there are few respectable ladies who visit this city, that do not call on Mrs. Eaton; and I repeat does it redound to the credit of any gentleman or lady, to have his, or her name associated with such a group of gossips as I have described, and whose principal business it is to run about the country and point to the mote in their brother or sister's eye without being conscious of the beam that lurks in their own.

Having done what I conceived to be my duty as the friend of yourself and Major Eaton, I will drop this delicate, and, I assure you to me, unpleasant subject, with this remark. I will never abandon an old and well tried friend for new ones, for slight or trivial causes, nor will I ever be *silent* when female character is wantonly assailed and my name, or those of my family, falsely introduced to give weight as to the truth of the charge.

I am happy to have in my power to assure you that your fears are groundless with regard to Major Eaton's appointment having a tendency to embarrass my administration. The War Department is conducted with more ability than it ever has been since the days of Knox, and the Head of that Dept. is gaining popularity daily. I am entirely satisfied with the way, manner, and ability with which it is conducted; and as all the members of the Cabinet are acquainted with each other and approved the appointment of each, no cause can arise for dissatisfaction among them that did not exist at the time they took their seats in the Cabinet. But if I am, or should be mistaken in this, I have, I assure you, still energy enough to relieve myself from any such embarrassment, let it arise from what quarter, or source it may. I am not so blind as to believe that there are not other men in the U. States possessing as clear heads and as true h[e]arts as those, or a part of those, who compose my Cabinet.

Present me affectionately to Mary and the sweet little children and as usual believe me,

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Your friend