

## Andrew Jackson to John Rhea, June 2, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

### TO JOHN RHEA.1

1 Copy. Handwriting of John H. Eaton. Rhea was then in Washington. The next day he sent the following letter to ex-President Monroe:

“ *Dear Sir*, Not only with you but with other Presidents of the United States of America, have I been in Confidence. The Presidents Jefferson and Madison all had Confidence in me and I believe you also had equal Confidence in me and so had Mr Adams. I am obliged to write to you requesting you to Give information to me on the subjects hereafter stated, that is to say, Did you receive a Confidential Letter from General Andrew Jackson dated Sixth January One thousand Eight hundred and Eighteen in which, opinions were of his fully expressed and stated respecting the savages then depredating on the lives and property of our people, and in that Letter did he state that Amelia Island ought to be taken possession of in pursuance of the order of the government, at all hazards and simultaneously the whole of East Florida seized and held as an indemnity for the Outrages of Spain upon the property of our citizens—this done it puts all opposition down, secures to our citizens a complete indemnity and saves us from a War with Great Brittain, or some of the continental powers combined with Spain, and in that letter he, wrote to you, “this can be done without implicating the Government; let it be signified to me through any channel (\* say J Rhea) that the possession of the Floridas would be desirable to the United States and in Sixty days it will be accomplished”. You did receive that letter of A Jackson and you will so write to me. With you I had many confidential conversations, respecting Genl A Jackson. If you ask I can tell you the day and time—that confidential Letter or the substance of it. You did communicate confidentially to me, you approved of

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the opinions of Andrew Jackson by him stated in that confidential Letter and did authorise me so to write to him. I did accordingly write to him. He says he received my letter on his way to Fort Scot and acted accordingly, that is he prosecuted the war against the savages, put an end to their ravages and gave security to the people of the United States, and all was done, I beleive, pursuant to the desires and Expectation of the Government.

“After that war was finished a question was raised in your cabinet by some member thereof respecting the authority by which General Jackson acted in Carrying on that war; that question was got over in your Cabinet. In congress that question was examined by Cobb's resolutions in the House of Representatives, and Mr. Lacoeks committee in the Senate and passed over. I do know that Genl. Jackson was in Washington City in January in the Year One thousand Eight hundred and Ninteen, and you also does know, my confidential Letter, above alluded to, was still preserved and I believed in possession of General Jackson. some reason, not necessary now to be mentioned, occurred to you, that induced you to request me to request General Jackson to burn or destroy that confidential Letter of mine to him. in consequence thereof, I went to Genl Jackson at his lodging and did request him to destroy that confidential Letter of mine, written to him by me in answer to his said confidential Letter to you, and he did promise to me that he would destroy it when he went home, and he has informed me that on the twelfth day of April One thousand Eight hundred and ninteen he did burn it. I do request you to answer this letter fully and in a few days and particularly, did you authorise me to write the confidential Letter, alluded to, to General Jackson in answer to his said confidential Letter to you, did you afterwards in this city (Washington) when General Jackson was. here, request me to go to him and request him to destroy the said confidential Letter of mine to him? be pleased to answer directly and explicitly and fully and soon. You know I always supported you, and now let me inform you that it is absolutely nec[e]ssary for yourself and me that you do fully answer this Letter. I hope you will believe me to be as I have been your sincere freind.”

When this letter was written Monroe, very old and infirm, was closing his earthly career in the home of his son-in-law, Samuel L. Gouverneur, in New York. After hesitating some

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days, and taking the advice of friends, Gouverneur decided to show it to the invalid Monroe, who dictated a denial which he signed with witnesses June 19, 1831. He died on the fourth of July following. His statement is in *Writings of James Monroe*, ed. Hamilton, VII. 234, where may be found other utterances supporting this statement. See *ibid.*, pp. 137–142, 156–163, 165–167, 169–171; see also Samuel L. Gouverneur to Jackson, Jan. 6, 1837, in vol. V. of this series.

Writing to Jackson from New York, Oct. 20, 1832, Col. James A. Hamilton made the following assertion: “I understand that when Mr Rea's letter was received it was read over to him again and again and paragraph by paragraph and that he thus replied to it, his reply being reduced to writing in the presence of his friends. It would have been fair if this answer had been communicated to Mr Rea, which it might well have been done. It is upon this statement that Mr. Gouverneur as I am told founds his assertion.” Jackson MSS. See also pp. 212n., 213n., *ante*.

Washington, June 2, 1831.

*Hon Jno. Rhea* , On the 6 of Jany 1818 I wrote a confidential letter to Mr. Monroe a copy of which marked A I here inclose you, in which you will 21 find the following expressions. “Let it be signified to me thro any channel, (say, J. Rhea) that the possession of the Floridas would be desirable to the U States and in 60 days it will be accomplished.” About the 20 or 22d of February on my way to Fort Scott I recvd your letter informing me, that Mr. Monroe had shown you my confidential letter to him of the 6 of Jany 1818 and approved thereof; and further, that ample instructions had been, or would be given on that head. In substance going to show, that the course pointed out in my confidential letter to him was approved. I quote from memory—your letter was burned.

Towards the rise of Congress, after the debate on the Seminole question in 1819 had closed, you came to me at Strathers Hotel, and enquired if I had recvd such a letter from you, I replied that I had. You then requested me as an old friend, for gods sake to burn

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it as soon as I got home. I promised that I would, and did so. This was done on the 12 of April 1819, and is so endorsed on the margin of my letter Book, opposite where the confidential letter is recorded.

The object of this communication is to request you to say, whether the fact as stated, to wit, your request to me to burn the letter is not correct, and whether that request proceeded from any intimation or suggestion, of Mr. Monroe and Mr. Calhoun, or either of them.

I am very respectfully etc.