

TWO LETTERS OF 1831 BY JAMES H. ATHERTON

BY SAMUEL M. WILSON

Lexington, Kentucky

To the Editor of *The Filson Club History Quarterly*:

In 1942 I sent you a compilation of thirteen copies of original letters written by one James H. Atherton during a tour made by him in the latter part of the year 1831 and the early months of the year 1832. This compilation was published, with an introduction pertaining to James H. Atherton and some of his kinsmen, in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, October, 1942, pages 208 to 226.

Within the past few days I have received from my friend, Miss Rebecca W. Spalding, of New York City, a transcript of two additional letters forming part of the series which I sent you, of which one was written from Nashville, Tennessee, on November 24, 1831, and the other letter appended thereto was written from Lexington, Kentucky, on December 17, 1831. I did not have either the originals or any copies of these letters when I prepared and sent you my compilation, but I think these letters are of sufficient importance to preserve in the *History Quarterly*, if you can make room for them, inserting a short explanatory note saying that they were unavailable when the previous collection of letters was published. The originals were presented to the Tennessee Historical Society by Miss Spalding Sincerely, SAMUEL M. WILSON.

Nashville Tenn

Nov. 24th 1831

Miss Mary Ann Atherton

Amherst, N. H.

Dear Sister

My last was to father from Smithland at the mouth of the Cumberland river. Three days ride over the most horrid road I ever travelled, brought me to this place. It was

like going through purgatory to paradise; for Nashville is the most beautiful City, not only in the Western country but I think I can say in the world, I have ever seen. It is situated principally on a high promontory of limestone on the Southern bank of the Cumberland, but extends through a valley on to several other hills of the same nature covered with cedar, a tree, which being evergreen adds much to the beauty of the place, particularly in winter when one expects to see all foliage dead. The style of building is decidedly superior to anything I have seen West of the mountains and indeed, I know of no place in the U. S. where there are so many elegant and so few inferior houses in proportion to the size. It is a place of considerable business but never destined to equal in commercial importance either Cincinnati, Louisville or St. Louis. The present population is about 6000. The society is better than in any place in the west except it be Lexington, and in hospitality, kindness and attention to strangers, the inhabitants are not excelled. I was disappointed at finding on my arrival that Judge Peck had left town for his residence in East Tenn but I was compensated in the acquaintance of another Judge from what I can learn is superior in every respect. I also had a letter to a son-in-law of Senator Grundy. Felix, himself has gone to Washington but his wife and daughter are at home. I have had several edifying disputes with the old lady about the Unitarian religion, she being a bitter presbyterian. The attention of the three gentlemen to whom I had letters as also that of many others who make it a point to render the stay of strangers agreeable, has caused a week to fly away almost imperceptibly. I have had invitations to dinner or tea parties almost every day and have attended a wedding and wedding party at which nearly four hundred were present. The wedding was that of a grandson of two signers of the declaration of independence. I shall endeavor to tear myself away from this fascinating place day after tomorrow and proceed to Lexington visiting on the way the famous Mammoth Cave. This I shall not send till I have time to write more.

Lexington, Dec. 17th 1831.

My dear Father,

I have been detained at this place a fortnight past by a severe fit of sickness. I am now entirely out of danger and recovering, but it will be some time before I am able to travel. When that is the case I shall turn my face homeward. My friends here are very attentive to me and provide me with every thing a sick man can wish. I have written Cincinnati to have whatever letters there may be there forwarded to me.

Your affectionate son

JAMES H. ATHERTON.