

Belvoir, [Md.] Feb. 5th, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I am at last able to write to you with some prospect of my letters reaching you. I arrived here two weeks since, & would have written to you sooner than this knowing your anxiety to hear from home, but I have been quite sick, & am not yet well, but feel able to-day to write some letters for the first time since my arrival. I took cold in crossing the Bay which, from not taking proper care of myself, increased until I became quite ill with fever & neuralgia in my head, & my sufferings were intense. The fever left me some days ago, but the dreadful pain in my head remained—it is, however, gradually wearing off and I hope soon to be quite well again.

I left Port Gibson, or rather Gravelford,¹ on the 28th Dec. I was in Town the week before I left, & all our friends were well. I believe none of them thought I would be able to reach Maryland or I am sure they would have written by me—it seems so hopeless getting letters to or from friends beyond the Confederacy that it is seldom anyone thinks of writing now. We never know whether you had received our letters after the death of your dear son. I heard only after my arrival here that you had received them. We all wrote then—Emily,² Cousin Sarah,³ Sarah Shumaker,⁴ & myself. We had a good opportunity by a gentleman from Louisville, a son of Dr. Breckenridge of Oakland Col. He ran the blockade, spent a week or two with his Father, & on his return was willing to take any number of letters. We heard of his safe arrival in Memphis, but never knew whether he had succeeded in getting the letters through the lines.

I have no more particulars to tell you about poor dear Aaron's⁶ last days, and the circumstances of his death, than you already know through those letters. Young Donalson Jenkins⁷—John's⁸ son—who is now on Earl's staff, & is a remarkably intelligent, promising young man, spoke to me at Grenada in the highest terms & very affectionately of Aaron—said there was no truth in the report that he had on a Federal uniform, so far from it, he had thrown off his coat on account of the heat, & was in his shirt sleeves, & was as cool, with his exceeding bravery & gallantry, as any man on the field—that Gen. Hindman⁹ said he never expected to have such another brave man on his staff. Donelson saw him fall—stationed a guard over his body, & afterwards had him buried decently, & his grave well marked. You know Earl with his command had not arrived there from Arkansas—Your letter to Gen. _____ I have forgotten his name, — was sent by Gen. Rosencrans [sic] with a flag of truce to Earl at Holly Springs, after the battle of Corinth I think, requesting Earl to designate the grave, & he would comply with your request—which was done. Alas! how many distressing, heart-rending cases there are in this terrible war. Poor Mrs. Martin's for instance—her son James¹⁰ (Capt. Martin) was mortally wounded at the battle of Sharpsburg—fell into the hands of the enemy, & died in the field hospital at that place—that is all they know about him—poor Mr. Martin begged me with tears in his eyes, & heart too full almost for utterance, to write after I arrived in Md. and try to find out something about his last moments, & where his grave is, if possible, & have it marked that they might hereafter recover the dead body of their son—Not many of our friends in old Claibourne have been called on to mourn the loss of

friends in this terrible conflict, when we consider how many have Fathers, sons & brothers in the army. Poor Edward Archer was killed in one of the battles before Richmond. Young Steven Archer died at home from some disease contracted in camp—Mrs. McAlpine's two sons Edward and John, I think was the other, were killed before Richmond—Maj. Sidney Wilson was mortally wounded at Sharpsburg, & died afterward, in Virginia—Mrs. Lowry's son was killed also—I think those were all—John Coleman was severely wounded, & it was thought would be lamed for life, but has very nearly recovered & has returned to duty in Va. He is [a] Lieut. in Capt. George Fulkerson's Co. He has lost his left arm. George Lewis was discharged from duty on account of deafness. Andrew¹¹ has been serving in the ranks in the 12th. Miss. ever since the war commenced—has been in most of the battles in Va. & has never been hurt, always writes home cheerfully. & never complains. Cousin George¹² enlisted in the ranks at the time Port Gibson was threatened, and is one of the most doughty of Confederate soldiers—he is now Ordnance Sargent [sic] at Port Hudson with Isaac¹³ who is Chief of Ordnance on Gen. Beall's staff with the rank of Captain—he and Eugenia came on to Richmond with me—he having business there. Emily is living in her house in Pt. Gibson, which is a very nice comfortable little establishment. Bro Earl helps her some, besides Mr. M.¹⁴ a little only now—and she has some music schollars [sic] —Mary Stanford & Jeanie P. also board with her & live in Miss M. Leghowner's house across the street. Mary came from N. Orleans after its fall to be able to hear from Ford who is Lieut. in Capt. Latrobe's battery now at Vicksburg—Mary had of course to leave her servants in N. Orleans, which reduced her income so much that she is teaching school—about 20 children go to her & besides teaching them, she writes little plays which they perform at the Town Hal—have tableaux & recitations etc, all to raise socks for the soldiers, and were having grans success when I left—Those little children have made altogether a thousand pairs of socks—All that the southern ladies think of—talk of—or work for now is to make clothing for the army & our army was pretty well supplied when I left, & our people have a plenty to eat—not the least danger of starvation, in spite of the wishes & prayers of our enemies, & the reports they get out to that effect. The Southerners have, of course, to do without many articles of luxury they have been accustomed—to, but the necessaries of life are plentiful, & they are satisfied in doing without the luxeries [sic] —They do not wish to "return to the flesh-pots of Egypt." Many of the wealthiest family's have neither flour or coffee, and sit down to corn bread & potatoes, & potato coffee, or some other substitute, just as cheerfully as though they had all the luxeries in the land—They have learned to make corn bread so delicious, & in so many varieties, that I prefer it now to flour bread - and by sifting the corn meal several times through gause, as nice pound cakes & sponge cakes can be made as I ever saw. Mrs. Archer handed me some sponge cake (with home-made blackberry wine) so nice that I thought it was made of flour—This war has done the Southern ladies more good than anything that could have happened—they have become so industrious & managing and ingenious in inventing substitutes for what they cannot get—You scarcely ever enter a house now without hearing the sound of a spinning wheel or loom, & nearly every plantation manufactures its own clothing—There are any quantity of goods in the Confederacy now, from England, France, etc, etc. but are enormously high & hard to get—for instance, coarse red flannel is \$5 per yd, & from that up to ten for fine. Ladies shoes \$15 & 20—DeLaine dress patterns \$60—pr of military boots \$60—sack coffee \$100—bbl Flour \$100—and so on—How people live I

cannot imagine, but all seem to get along very well, & I have never heard of any suffering among the poorer classes—I never was at Cousin Sarah's without her having a little flour & coffee—Emily generally has some—Eugenia has never been without—Mrs. Parker the same—At the time the soldiers were stationed there, I think most of the Port Gibson people supplied themselves by exchanging corn meal for flour—two bbls meal for one flour—with the Quarter Master of the Regt. —The soldiers encamped in Mrs. Parker's woods near the Burkington¹⁵ lane—The girls nurse all in their glory at that time—Mrs. Coleman was manager general in the hospitals and every one took an active part in the good work.—

Well I have told pretty much all about Port Gibson that I can think of, & now will tell you what I know you are most anxious to hear—about dear Earl—You need not believe one of the falsehoods that have been circulated against him—he has been abused by the miserable editors because he offended them when he first took command of the Department of Miss. Up to that time no man in the army stood higher than he did—In the Army of the Potomac it was said "they had lost almost their right arm" when he was appointed to the command in Missouri & Arkansas, or the "Trans Miss. Dept." as it was called—That caused jealousy among Gen. Price's friends who were ready and eager to catch at anything to injure Earl—After the retreat from Corinth he was appointed to the command of Southern Miss. & East Louisiana, & was received with open arms—every one was delighted—the papers and all, said it had infused new life into the Dept. & given confidence to all—At that time it was said there were many traitors in Miss., many who tried to depreciate Confederate money & would give information to the enemy from different points on the river—the whole of which the enemy then had possession of with the exception of that portion immediately in front of Vicksburg. Soon after Earl came to Jackson it was represented to him that Judge Sharkey¹⁶ was trying to depreciate Confederate money—having determined to put a stop to it, Earl had him arrested as soon as he would the poorest man in the state—being a rich & influential man, with many personal & political friends, he & they have done all they could to injure him ever since. Judge Sharkey was acquitted after trial, but that did not make it seem any less Earl's duty to have him tried upon such a charge.

Earl also issued an order declaring martial law in the Dept., and saying that any editor who should publish anything relating to the movement of troops, or anything calculated to impair the confidence of the troops in the commanders the President had seen fit to place over them, should be arrested and the paper suppressed. All of which gave great offence to editors all over the country—hence the vile slanders they have originated & circulated against him. —Editors, you know, lead the people by the nose at will, & although Earl had many warm friends left, the people generally joined in the cry against him—particularly after the disaster at Corinth—he was terribly abused after that, until Gen. Bowen brought the charges against him & the Court of Inquiry was called. The charges were said to be trivial, such as that Gen. Van Dorn had made the attack on Corinth without due consideration—had not taken the precaution to acquaint himself with the topography of the country around, & half a dozen more charges of the same nature. It gave him an opportunity of self defence which he fully availed himself of, & requested that the charge of drunkenness (which had not been made by Gen. Bowen, but had been

extensively circulated and believed, & which affected his character as an officer) should be investigated. It resulted in his triumphant acquittal, & Clem¹⁷ told me there had been a great revulsion of feeling in the Army since the Court of Inquiry had been held—and the people had begun to praise him as much as ever, at the time I left Miss. which was immediately after his successful cavalry raid against Holly Springs etc. It was that raid that saved Mississippi from being overrun by the enemy. Gen. Grant with a large Army was coming down on the Mobile & Ohio R.R. towards Columbus, Miss, flanking us on the right—when Earl with 5000 Cavalry went up suddenly, & with the celerity he is noted for, destroyed all of Gen. Grant's stores, and compeled him to retreat towards Memphis—that was before our reinforcements had arrived, or our fortifications at Grenada had been completed, & our whole Army in Miss, would have been obliged to retreat into Alabama, & not only the state but the river, & all the states west of it, would have been lost to us—Earl has done good service to the South, and it will be acknowledged some day—He established & fortified the important post of Port Hudson whilst he was in command and defended Vicksburg when, as his friends said, any other man would have given it up—& when the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry are published (as they have been by this time) full justice will be done him & he will not be blamed for the defeat at Corinth—that battle was a brilliant success at first, & would have been finally but for an accident which no human foresight could guard against, & which he has explained fully to the War Department.—At the time I left he was having published at Mobile 1000 pamphlets containing the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry to be distributed in the Army & among his friends everywhere. They were not out when I left but I read a copy in manuscript whilst at Grenada a week or ten days before I came on to Va.—After the summing up, Earl's defense was read in court by his Lawyer, and it was the most beautifully written & touching thing I ever read in my life—even old Gen. Price and the other Genls. sitting on the bench in the Court were seen with tears streaming down their faces. I wish I could remember something of it to tell you—After proving clearly as the light of day and beyond the shadow of doubt or cavil that the charges were all false—drunkenness & all—and making Brigadier Gen. Bowen appear so exceedingly small and ridiculous, & that without an ill-natured word against him or against anyone else—the defense went on, and alluded in one short phrase only to the vile slanders against him- saying they were of a nature that could not be presented before that Court—if true they would stamp him as a character too base for consideration— (or something of that sort)—"but that they were born of malice and falsehood, and only escaped vindication by escaping investigation"—It then alluded to his native state in whose defense he had been fighting for nearly a quarter of a century—it had been his pride to serve her—his blood had always been ready to flow in her defense—he well remembered with what pleasure he returned, after many years of absence in her service, to his native state & beheld the skies that canopied the spot where first he saw the light, & to the soil where reposed the ashes of his parents—that he had used every exertion & bent every energy of his mind to defend that sacred soil. Yet in the midst of it she had inflicted this blow, & had assailed his character as a gentleman & an officer which it was a soldiers pride to guard so jealously—and which had prompted him to place this defense as an antidote beside the poison of Calumny which had stung him.—

You understand- I do not pretend to give the language, for it was as I said written beautifully, but those were something of the ideas presented towards the close of the defense. I only wish I could have gotten one of the pamphlets before I left to send you. They must have been out as I came through Mobile, if I had only known it, for we travelled in the same car part of the way with the President and his staff, & they were reading one of them. They were seated very near me, and I heard their conversation, or rather a few remarks with regard to it. The President said "It was the most complete vindication he had ever see"—Gen. Joe Davis, his nephew said "Yes it sustained Van Dorn fully" and remarked how glad he was he had seen it—Dear Earl bore all the abuse that was heaped upon him most nobly—and conducted himself throughout with much dignity and good sense, and in the right kind of spirit—I was afraid his spirits and fortitude might sink under it all, as it was said poor Gen. A. Sidney Johnson's [sic] did, but no such thing, he looks as well as I ever saw him, if not better, and bears up bravely & nobly against it—he laughed and told me he had not a grey hair yet, nor had he lost a meal in consequence of it—and he relates anecdotes as well & with as much spirit as ever. He hates Mississippians though, and Clem says he is a very unhappy man—Clem loves him better: than any body in the world, except his mother, & says he would lay down his life for him at any moment. Earl says he has the satisfaction of knowing that those who know him best love him the most. Clem thinks him a great man, & that he has not his superior in the Confederate Army—Another thing I must tell you that Clem says—he will make oath, he says, that he has not seen the Genl. drink too much, or seen him under the effects of liquor, since he has had a separate command—that once or twice in the Army of the Potomac, at about Christmas time, when Gen. Beauregard was presenting battle flags to the different regiments, all the Genls. used to to dine with each other around at their different head-quarters & that all of them sometimes indulged a little too freely, but not since, so far as his Uncle was concerned.— Earl said to me whilst I was at Grenada that he had been under a cloud, but that he thought it was breaking away, & would soon pass—I said I hoped so indeed, & that I thought there would be a reaction so soon as his defense was published, that the people would find they had done him an injustice and would love him more than they ever did.—"But," said he, "they can never repair the injury they have me—before I came to Miss. I stood first on the list for promotion, & now I stand seventh"—He would have been the senior Lieut. Genl. but for all the injury they did him by writing this abuse to the President.—The defeat at Corinth alone would not have done it—Just before that battle he had been removed by his own request from command in Miss. & appointed to the Dept. of West Tennessee—He had to fight the enemy at Corinth, or Memphis, or some other place in that vicinity before getting up to his head quarters, that was in accordance to orders—he & Gen. Price had been in correspondence on the subject for weeks & had agreed to unite their forces and attack Corinth as the most assailable—In the Meantime Gen. Pemberton had been appointed to take command in Miss. & when the defeat of Corinth threw Earl back into the Dept. of Miss, and all the abuse came so thick & fast upon him, then it was injustice was done Earl by the President & War Dept.—Gen. Pemberton was made Lieut. Gen. that he might take command over a Senior Major Genl. and five other Genls. were also made Lieut. Genls. which threw Earl back to the seventh on the list—I hope that after the President having seen & approved of his defense, he will yet do something for Earl—Of course that is all false about his having left his wife, or of her suing for a divorce from

him—I do not know whether he had heard the report or not, he did not mention it, but told me he had received a letter from Caroline¹⁸ a few days before, and told me how affectionately she had spoken of me—He intended going down to see her, & was to have gone that far with me, when the Cavalry expedition was decided on and he could not go—I left home for Va. just as he returned from Grenada, he & Clem all safe, and the people were then loud in Earl's praises—I believe I have told you everything you would like to know about him, & my letter is getting entirely too long—Did you wonder at my leaving the South at this time? It was very hard for me to do, but I thought my duty called me here to be with Octavia¹⁹ during her trying time and besides, I owed money here which I was anxious to come and pay—I was too late to be with poor Sis though—her little boy was five weeks old when I arrived. I was glad to hear Douglas²⁰ had been here on a visit, but very sorry I had missed seeing him—Mr. Henry²¹ was charmed with him, & he & Sis were sorry when he left them—They both send much love to yourself, Mag. & Douglass—to which you must add mine also—Mr. H. says he would not inflict one of his letters upon you, but got Mrs. Murray to write instead—he never write to any one. When he is obliged to write he gets Octavia to write for him—he says he has sent you enough papers to keep you busy as long as the war lasts—Mrs. Murray has written you a long letter, & will write again, & sends you the "Baltimore Weekly Sun" every week. Mr. Henry says tell Missie he intends to kiss her the first time he sees her for what she said about him in her last letter to Octavia—she says she had a letter on hand to you, & had nearly finished it when I arrived—She is so bad about writing I doubt whether she will ever get through with another to California or elsewhere, now that I have come back—Poor child! Has she not had a servitude to babies? Married only three years and has had three babies! Dear little Hans²² [?] is a little angel now and time has tempered our grief for his loss—but the memory of his sufferings causes a severe pang whenever we think of him—

I have tried Dear Jane²³ think of every thing to tell you that you would like to hear, but you know I am rather a poor letter writer, and although this letter seems long, I have a suspicion that there is very little in it of interest. You must question me as to all you would like to know & I will write to you faithfully, without any more procrastinations, & whether I hear from you or not will write immediately whenever I hear anything of interest from the South that is of private & particular interest—You of course see the general news in the newspapers—Sit down and ask me all the questions you like & I will answer them immediately. I feel great concern about Miss. We are very strong & very confident of success at Vicksburg & Port Hudson, but the enemy is making such gigantic efforts to capture them and reopen the River we cannot help feeling some uneasiness—The battle, however, "is not always to the strong" and we will continue to put our trust in Him who has already helped us so wonderfully. How terrible this war is! All others sink into insignificance in comparison with it—May God in Mercy soon send us blessed peace once more.—

Isaac²⁴ has not been in a battle yet & has only been under fire once, just before our Army left Corinth last summer—but Clem has been in four or five, & has distinguished himself for bravery. Earl says "he is as gallant as the bravest of men could be." He was taken prisoner at the Battle of the Hatchie—was paroled & came down to

Gravelford and spent nearly a month with us there before he was exchanged—I had so much satisfaction from his visit that I told him I was glad he had been taken prisoner—

I did not tell you of Earl's²⁵ (Emily's) being in the Army. Bro. Earl got him a commission as Cadet, & he gets \$40 per month, and is serving in the Army at P. Hudson. Marshall²⁶ enlisted last summer when P. Gibson was threatened, but being under age, Emily succeeded in getting him discharged & he now goes to school to Mr. Moore, who is still living in Mrs. Butler's²⁷ house. She's at "The Hill"²⁸ which you know she bought from Isaac & has improved very much—They are all delighted with it as a residence—everything else is pretty much in status quo—Dr. Abbey has bought & lives at my old home the Oaken Squares²⁹—Syd & George³⁰ both in the Army—& nearly every one else excepting Mr. Miller,³¹ Leonard,³² & a few others who ought to be in—John Parker has a substitute & stays at home to attend to the business of the two families—Jimmie is in the ranks at Port Hudson in a cavalry company & is a gallant soldier—his health would have exempted him, but he would go in spite of everything—Sam Duncan & a great many of the wealthiest, men, of his stamp, are at home doing nothing—

Henry Hughes³³ died last summer—William³⁴ is at home—so is Jim Wood—Mary has two children—Sarah three—Mrs. McCoy is living in her new house on the hill by Mrs. Coleman's—Mrs. Chaplain & all well as usual—Wm. Ellett & Katie Stowers are engaged to be married—Job Routh & Priscilla Jeffries were married just before I left home—and now I believe that is all the news—Give my best love to dear brother Aaron³⁸—tell him he never will write to me, but I love him as much as ever, and never pray for myself without praying for him & all of you. You do not seem so far off whilst I am praying to Heaven for you in connection with those I love nearer to me. When you write tell me all about yourselves—You, Mag & little Hattie—Aaron—& Douglas—I hope & trust he may have success in his new undertaking—I was charmed with Aaron's account of his exploring expedition & would be glad to see everything from his pen—Sis sends her love to her Uncle Aaron also—

Ann Murray & Elizabeth send love to you—the former seems extremely grateful to you for your efforts to find out [about] her son—

I hope you will write to me soon. I pray that the blessing of Heaven may rest upon you all my dear Sister, & that we may all meet once more—if not in this world in a far better one, where the weary will be at rest forever.

Believe me ever your affectionate Sister,

O. Sulivane
[Octavia Sulivane]

Annotations on the Letter from Octavia Van Dorn Sulivane to her sister, Jane Van Dorn Vertner, February 5, 1863.

1. Gravelford, the writer's point of departure on December 28, 1862. There is no present place name in Claiborne County like that. The nearest I can come up with is Grindstone Ford, a point where the old Natchez Trace cross the North Fork of Bayou Pierre about six miles northeast of Port Gibson. That road was in use at the time of the Civil War and for many years afterward. This name bears further investigation on my part. (See Note. 24.)

2. Emily, Emily Van Dorn Miller, the eighth of the nine children of Peter Aaron and Sophia Donelson Caffery Van Dorn. In 1903 she published *A Soldier's Honor—Reminiscences of His Comrades*, an apologia and biography of her brother, Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn, CSA. For many years this was the only full-length biography of Earl. She was named for her first cousin once removed, Emily Tennessee Donelson, at once first cousin and spouse of Andrew Jackson Donelson, Jackson's private secretary during his White House years. Emily Donelson was herself Jackson's official hostess at the White House during the first two years of his presidency.

3. Cousin Sarah, Mrs. Sarah Knox Sevier, a first cousin of Mrs. Sulivane and her siblings, only surviving daughter of John and Mary (Polly) Caffery Knox. Mrs. Sevier was born at St. Elmo in Claiborne County, where her parents and grandparents, John and Mary Donelson Caffery, were living in 1809. Mrs. Caffery was an older sister of Rachel Donelson Robards Jackson, Mrs. Andrew Jackson. Sarah Knox Sevier's father was a cousin of President James Knox Polk.

The Knoxes returned to Nashville, Tenn., about 1814, after which both of the parents died and Sarah was taken in by the Jacksons and reared by them at The Hermitage. In 1829 she married Dr. George Washington Sevier, a dentist and grandson of Gen. John Sevier, Revolutionary War hero but later bitter political and personal enemy of Andrew Jackson. The marriage of the two at The Hermitage was ironic in view of the enmity of the older people.

The Seviere came to Port Gibson, where they had several children. Two of their sons were killed in the Civil War. The Seviere are buried in Wintergreen Cemetery in Port Gibson and there is a house still standing that older people recall as the "Sevier House".

4. Sarah Shumaker, (the Van Dorn genealogy spells it "Shoemaker") oldest of the three children of John Overton and Mary Ann Van Dorn Lacy, oldest of the nine children of Peter Aaron and Sophia Van Dorn (q.v.). She was born near Franklin, La., and she and her family eventually moved to Grass Valley, California. Tradition has it they went west in the Gold Rush of 1849, but they must have returned to Mississippi for a time. Eventually they made their way back to California. I am in possession of photos of Sarah Shoemaker and her husband and son.

5. Oakland College, a Presbyterian college founded in 1831, located closer to Rodney, Miss., in Jefferson County, than to Port Gibson, but still in Claiborne County. The

college continued until it was sold by the Presbyterian Synod of Mississippi to the State of Mississippi in 1869.

In 1871 the State of Mississippi founded Alcorn College (now Alcorn State University), the oldest land-grant college for blacks in the US today. The Presbyterians took the proceeds of the sale and used it to found Chamberlain-Hunt Academy, initially a boys' boarding school in 1879 (co-ed since 1970) in Port Gibson. CHA is named for Dr. Jeremiah Chamberlain, founding father of Oakland, and David Hunt, a major landowner and planter and early benefactor of Oakland College.

Earl Van Dorn attended Oakland College beginning in 1837, the year before he entered West Point, according to papers in his father's estate record. His brother, Aaron (q.v. Note 38) attended for one year beginning in 1839.

The identity of the "Dr. Breckinridge" bears investigation, since it is to be suspected he was a relative of John Breckinridge, former Vice President of the US and unsuccessful candidate for the Presidency in 1860.

6. Aaron—Aaron Van Dorn Vertner, son of John David and Jane Van Dorn Vertner of Port Gibson, a nephew of Earl Van Dorn and his siblings, killed at Shiloh, Tenn. He was a member of Moody's Battery, Madison Troops, more particularly of the Lake Providence (La.) Cadets. I have in my possession a typescript of a letter describing in detail his death in battle and will donate a copy to The Army Military History Institute. Aaron Vertner's mother, Jane, already a widow, was the recipient of the letter which I am annotating.

7. Donalson (Donelson is the correct spelling) Jenkins, son of John Jenkins (q.v.), a cousin once-removed of the Van Dorn siblings, descendant of Dr. John Jenkins and his wife, nee Nancy Caffery. Mrs. Jenkins was one of the eight daughters of John and Mary Caffery (q.v.) and a sister of Sophia Van Dorn.

8. John Jenkins. See the foregoing for his relationship to the Van Dorns. I think these people were from around Lake Providence, La.

9. Gen. Hindman. General Thomas Hindman of Helena, Ark., one of seven Confederate generals from that area. He was a leader in white resistance to Reconstruction and was assassinated from ambush in the latter 1860's, a crime which was never solved.

10. Capt. James Martin. I am not 100% sure of his identity, but suspect he was of a family who relate to me on my father's side, through his mother and the McCalebs. In my boyhood there was still living a Mrs. Martin, the widow of John McCaleb Martin, a Confederate veteran and attorney who had died many years ago. I recall my mother taking me with her as she went to call on this elderly lady who lived about a block and a half south of where we lived. It is possible this lady's late husband was a brother of James Martin.

11. Andrew. Andrew Jackson Sevier, one of the sons of Sarah Knox Sevier, who was later killed the Civil War. Two of the Sevier brothers perished in the Civil War.

The other names mentioned between Nos. 9 and 10 are not related to me, although I know of the family names. I think John Coleman was the son of a Judge Coleman who built (ca. 1835-40) the house which I presently own and which has been in the hands of my family since 1891. The Colemans were not related to my family. The Judge was a prominent Whig in Claiborne County, and there is an historical plaque in front of our house telling that Henry Clay, the Whig candidate for the presidency, addressed a crowd from the front porch of the house during the 1844 campaign.

12. Cousin George. George Sevier, another son of the Seviers, brother of Andrew.

13. Isaac. Isaac Allison Ross, son of Octavia Sulivane by her first husband, Allison Ross, who died after they were married only two years, leaving her this one son. Isaac Ross the son later married Eugenia Calhoun, a daughter of John C. Calhoun, Vice President of the United States during Andrew Jackson's first term, and later his bitter political foe. This is another irony in the fact that the younger people apparently ignored the animosities of their parents and collateral antecedents. Isaac Ross was a great-great nephew of Jackson's wife, Rachel. See my comments about Sarah Knox Sevier (Note 3).

14. Mr. M. William Trigg Miller, husband of Emily Van Dorn Miller. See further mention of him on Page 11 of the typescript of the letter and also Note 31.

15. Burkington (correct spelling: BURLINGTON). Home built for Emily Van Dorn Miller and her family, now known as McGregor, just east of the present Port Gibson city limits along State Highway 547. Burlington Lane is a short road that runs north of Highway 547 at a point opposite the northeastern corner of the property on which the house stands. The present name of the house comes from Clan McGregor, of which the subsequent owners, surnamed Magruder, are descended.

16. Judge Sharkey. W. L. Sharkey, Chief Justice of Mississippi. This is something that bears further investigation on my part. There is nothing in Hartje's book about this controversy, and this is one of many ways that this letter by Octavia Sulivane sheds new light on Earl Van Dorn's career. Judge Sharkey, incidentally, is the namesake for the present Sharkey County, Miss., a Delta county ca. 40 miles north of Vicksburg, in which Peter Van Dorn's oldest daughter, Mary Ann Lacy, had a 600-acre plantation along Deer Creek. The area was a part of Washington County at that time.

17. Clement. Clement (Clem) Sulivane, Octavia's son by her second husband, Dr. Vance (sometimes spelled "Vans") Sulivane. He attended Princeton University and the University of Virginia, studied law and was admitted to the bar in South Carolina. After the Civil War he settled in Maryland, where he practiced law and was active in Democratic politics. I would like to do further investigation of him, including check to see if there is a collection of his papers in the Maryland State Archives. He died in 1923. He was Earl Van Dorn's aide-de-camp until the latter's assassination May 7, 1863.

By now you should be grasping a pattern of nepotism in the appointment of staff officers by Earl Van Dorn. See footnote No. 7 on Donelson Jenkins. Another analogous example involved Earl's first cousin, Gen. John George Walker of Missouri, in his appointment of a much younger first cousin, Donelson Caffery, II, of Louisiana to his staff when the former was serving in Louisiana. Walker was the son of still another Caffery sister of Sophia Van Dorn, etc. This Caffery was the son of the oldest son of John and Mary Caffery, and died when his son was only three months old. The family seat was near Franklin, La., in St. Mary's Parish. See note No. 4 on Sarah Shoemaker.

This is not to suggest that the junior appointees were not capable or talented people. Donelson Caffery II later became a U. S. Senator from Louisiana. I think Clement Sulivane's later career was likewise commendable, though less conspicuous than Caffery's.

18. Caroline. Caroline Godbold Van Dorn, left a widow with two pre-teen children by Earl Van Dorn's assassination May 7, 1863, at Spring Hill, Tenn. Of all the critical witnesses to this drama, Caroline Van Dorn is silent in pen and tongue. She was the daughter of a plantation owner and lived near Calvert, Ala. She endured long separations from her husband because of his army career. By Earl, she had two children, a daughter, Olivia, and a son, Earl, Jr. The daughter died at age 27, leaving a husband and four children. Caroline Van Dorn survived the death of her daughter by only a few months. The son died unmarried at age 29 in April, 1884. With him the male line of Peter Aaron Van Dorn's family became extinct. Apparently contact with the direct descendants of Earl Van Dorn was lost early by descendants of Earl's siblings. I am eager to make contact with them, if any there be who can prove the connection to my satisfaction.

There are two other things I wish to comment on at this time. One is the discussion of Earl's apparent frustration at being "passed over" for promotion to lieutenant general. This bears out the criticism made by Hartje and other authors that he was "greedy for glory".

Another is Octavia's discussion of allegations of a marital rift between Earl and Caroline. This is the first instance I have seen any mention of it. This is another way in which this letter is significant. Even though it is denied, that does not dispel the accusations, particularly in the light of events soon to transpire and culminating in Dr. Peters' murder of Earl on the grounds that he was involved with the doctor's wife. There is too much documentary evidence—letters by Van Dorn's subordinates, both officers and enlisted, about his inappropriate attentions to ladies—to gloss over the very real possibility of a separation or divorce involving the general and his wife had he lived.

19. Octavia. Daughter of Octavia Sulivane, sister to Clement Sulivane, married to Ryder Henry in 1859 at Prospect Hill in Jefferson County, seat of the Ross family, of which Octavia's first husband was a member.

20. Douglas. Douglas Vertner, surviving son of Jane Van Dorn Vertner, also a lawyer and a public official in Columbus, Miss., after the Civil War. He was a brother of Aaron Van Dorn Vertner. Jane Vertner was married to John David Vertner, son of Daniel Vertner. The elder Vertner was a longtime friend and associate of Judge Peter Aaron Van Dorn.

Daniel Vertner was one of three executors of the will of Isaac Ross I, (d. 1836 at Prospect Hill), father of Allison Ross, first husband of Octavia Sulivane. The significance of this was that the elder Ross, a Revolutionary War veteran who came to Mississippi and acquired some 5,000 acres in Jefferson County plus numerous slaves, somehow became disenchanted with the institution of slavery and joined the American Colonization Society, which had as its purpose the return of African slaves to their ancestral continent. In his will, Ross manumitted about 250 of his slaves and set aside money to transport them to New Orleans and eventually to West Africa. The will was in litigation until 1848, when the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled it legal. Meanwhile Daniel Vertner had died several years before. The will was carried out and the slaves transported to Liberia, where descendants of them still live. These were among those of the privileged class displaced by a military coup some 10 years ago.

Daniel Vertner was also named executor of the will of his friend, Judge Van Dorn, who died in February, 1837. Earl Van Dorn and his younger brother Aaron brought suit against Vertner seeking an accounting of his handling of their father's estate. This was filed after Earl entered West Point, and was handled by Hugh Short, husband of a Jenkins first cousin of the Van Dorn siblings. Again, Vertner died before this estate was settled. It was a delicate matter in more than one way, particularly because the husband of one of the Van Dorn sisters was the son of the executor.

21. Mrs. Murray. Possibly this woman is a relative of Octavia's husband, Dr. Vans Murray Sulivane. My guess she is either a grandmother or an aunt by marriage. "Mag and Douglass"—Margaret Vertner (Mrs. Dunlop) and Douglass Vertner, surviving children of Jane Vertner.

22. Hans. The name of the infant whose birth Octavia went to attend should be "Vans" instead of "Hans". The Van Dorn genealogy gives the name of a deceased child of the younger Octavia in this form. Apparently this child died before he was six months old.

23. "Dear Jane," the recipient of the letter, Jane Van Dorn Vertner, third of the nine children of Peter Aaron and Sophia Caffery Van Dorn. I am not positive where she was living at the time the letter was written. Perhaps the address is on the original envelope, if that survived. My guess is that she was possibly in Columbus, Miss., where she lived in later life. She died in 1870, according to the Van Dorn genealogy.

Jane Vertner, married to John David Vertner, son of Daniel Vertner (q.v.), became the guardian and foster mother of the orphaned children of her oldest sister, Mary Ann Van Dorn Lacy (my direct ancestress) upon the death of her sister on her Deer Creek plantation in August, 1837, six months after the death of their father, Judge Van Dom.

The three children, Sarah (Mrs. Shumaker, spelled "Shoemaker" in the genealogy, John Overton Lacy, Jr., who died in 1839, and Mary Lacy (Mrs. James D. Wood {q.v. Note 36), my great-grandmother, were fetched from the remote plantation in then-Washington County by their uncle, Earl Van Dorn, age 17, and brought home, together with several slaves, household effects, etc., according to the estate papers. They were taken into the household of Mrs. Vertner, who herself was left a widow with three small children by the death of her husband in Galveston, Texas in 1840. The father of the Lacy children had died in 1834, at age 29, on their plantation near Franklin, La. He died about five weeks before the birth of his daughter, Mary.

I have in my possession the family Bible of the Lacys, in which are also entries made by Mrs. Vertner concerning her family. The Bible was presented to Mary Ann Van Dorn upon the occasion of her marriage, at age 14, in April, 1827, to John O. Lacy, age 21.

24. Isaac. Isaac Ross, Octavia Sulivane's only son by her first husband. From reading this and the sentence about Clem's having been taken prisoner at the Battle of the Hatchie, I have to revise my earlier statement about Gravelford, and now conjecture that it is somewhere in north-central Mississippi, possibly around Grenada. There are several rivers which have the Indian suffix "hatchie" in their name in that area.

25. Earl (Emily's Earl). Earl Van Dorn Miller, the older of Emily Miller's two sons. This Earl would have been working on 19 at the time of this letter. Note here, too, the pattern of nepotism represented in his appointment as a cadet with the help of his uncle.

I need to digress here and say Earl Miller was the first of several collateral relatives to be named for Earl Van Dorn. The first Earl in his turn was named for Ralph Eleazer Whitaker Earl, portrait artist who lived and worked in Nashville, and enjoyed the patronage and friendship of Andrew and Rachel Jackson. Ralph Earl was the son of a well-known Connecticut artist, also named Ralph Earl, who studied under Benjamin West in England.

Ralph E. W. Earl was introduced to Jane Caffery, sister of Sophia, etc., by her aunt, Rachel Jackson, and they were married at The Hermitage. She died less than a year after the marriage, after which the artist was invited to take up residence at The Hermitage. He painted some 34 portraits of Jackson, accompanied him to the White House and lived and worked there all during the Jackson presidency. He also painted a portrait of Rachel Jackson which the widowed President took with him to Washington and arranged it so that he looked at it when he retired to bed at night and again when he arose in the morning.

Earl Van Dorn was born in 1820, the year of his Aunt Jane's death, and so esteemed was the artist that the relatives in Mississippi apparently named their first son (fifth child) after him.

That Ralph Earl was the ultimate namesake is confirmed when Donelson Caffery II (q. v.) named his third son (born 1873) Ralph Earl Caffery. Ralph Earl, in turn, married in 1913 and sired 12 children. He named one of his older sons Joseph Earl and another "Philip Van Dorn Liddell Caffery". The Liddell part of the name commemorates another Confederate general, St. John Richardson Liddell, with whom this branch of the Caffery family has a collateral connection through the mother of Ralph Earl Caffery, wife of the senator. I have this on good authority from Patrick Thompson Caffery, himself a former congressman and Louisiana legislator, the 11th of the children of Ralph Earl Caffery. Gen. Liddell was a West Point dropout who was a colonel under EVD at Corinth.

The name "Earl Van Dorn" is carried by some of my mother's Wood relatives, including a surviving first cousin who lives in Metairie, La., and a nephew of his whom I never met, who lives in New Orleans.

Again, a digression upon the pattern of naming people in aristocratic Southern usage. The name "Jane" has been in use in the Caffery family and descendants from the time the future Mrs. Ralph Earl was born. My own mother was nee "Sarah Jane Pearson," her mother before her, "Sarah Jane (Miss Sally) Wood." My sister was christened "Jane Pearson Crisler", and her older daughter is "Mary Jane".

Of the name "Sarah", the usage of this can be traced back continuously 250 years in the Caffery family and descendants. My own daughter is "Sarah Emma Crisler". Emma is my wife's name, and our daughter is the fourth generation of her mother's family to carry that name.

26. Marshall (Thomas Marshall Miller). The younger of Emily V. D. Miller's two sons. He was 15 in 1862.

27. Mrs. Butler's house, (q.v. 28). The Mrs. Butler mentioned here is the widow of Rev. Zebulon Butler, Presbyterian minister and founder of the First Presbyterian Church of Port Gibson. Rev. Butler, a native of Pennsylvania, was a Princeton University (then King's College) classmate and friend of Alison Ross, first husband of Octavia Van Dorn Sulivane. Rev. Butler was induced to come to Port Gibson in 1827 in part through actions of Alison Ross. Rev. Butler died in Port Gibson December 23, 1860, on the eve of secession and civil war.

28. "The Hill." The brick Federal-style house built ca. 1828 by Peter Aaron Van Dorn. Earl Van Dorn spent his youth here, and the two youngest children, Emily and the youngest, a boy named Jacob (died 1837) were born here. After the death of his wife, Judge Van Dorn mortgaged the property for something like \$6,000 in 1834. This was still outstanding at his death, and the house had to be sold at auction by court order in 1841 to pay off the mortgage-holder, The Planters' Bank of Natchez.

It eventually passed into the hands of Isaac Ross, son of Octavia, who sold it for \$6,500 in June, 1860 to Rev. Butler. Rev. Butler died there six months later. The house, now uninhabitable in its present state, is listed on the National Register for Historic Places and

is owned by a direct descendant of Sarah Knox Sevier. In the early 1970's the house and 5.3 acres of the surrounding land were donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History for purposes of historic preservation. An ambitious program was conceived, but because of rising interest rates (to double-digit figures) and lack of state money the MDAH reluctantly returned the Van Dorn property to the donors several years later. A grant of some \$7,000 was obtained by the owners which they had to match, and this was used to install a new metal roof on the house.

29. "Oaken Squares", called Oak Square today, and located one-half block diagonally across Church Street from my own house in Port Gibson. The original dwelling referred to here was the only house on a city block 100 yards square, and it later was badly damaged by fire in the early years of the 20th Century. The then-owners built the present structure ca. 1906 in a vastly different style from the original. The present structure is Neoclassical Revival.

In the intermediate past the surrounding land area was subdivided so that the solitude of the house is no more. There are five other dwellings on the block, plus a dependency of the present house that contains an apartment and a garage. One of the dwellings is owned by the couple who own Oak Square, which they operate as a bed-and-breakfast and pilgrimage tour home. The present owners bought Oak Square in 1974 and began some costly repairs and new construction which included the dependency and an adjacent walled-in courtyard.

30. Syd and George. Sons of Sarah Knox Sevier.

31. Mr. Miller, Emily Miller's husband, William Trigg Miller. I know comparatively little about him.

32. Leonard. Possibly the first husband of Jane Vertner's daughter, Margaret. I have in my possession letters referring to Margaret as "Mrs. Leonard". By the time the Van Dorn genealogy was published in 1907, she was referred to as Margaret Dunlop. Again, I have a poverty of information, possibly something that has been allowed to develop intentionally by my predecessors.

33. Henry Hughes. Col. Hughes, 33 at the time of his death, is regarded by sociologists as the founder of their discipline and the first to coin the term "sociology" in his book, *Treatise on Sociology*, written in 1854 as a defense of slavery. He traveled in Europe and was a student of the French philosopher August Comte and his work has a considerable intellectual cachet amongst sociologists, albeit the views presented are hardly those of the liberal mind-set in that discipline of today. He participated in First Manassas and died of disease in the summer of 1862.

34. William. Possibly one of the several children of Sarah Knox Sevier, or else it is William Trigg Miller, husband of Emily (31).

35. Jim Wood. James Davenport Wood, my great-grandfather who served as a commissary sergeant in a Claiborne County company, and who was a plantation owner and slaveholder who had about 80 slaves. His father, Francis Wood, emigrated from Maryland in 1810, living first in Jefferson County, from which he marched off to New Orleans as a captain in the militia of that county in January, 1815.

36. Mary. Mary Lacy Wood, wife of James (35), younger daughter of Mary Ann Van Dorn Lacy (see Note. 23). She was born in 1834 and died in 1917. My mother remembered her. I have in my possession a small oil-on-panel of her attributed to her uncle, Earl Van Dorn, who had some artistic talent. I also have several photos of her, including one made in 1911 of her with a group of my mother's friends on the occasion of her 5th birthday. My mother's own mother, Sarah Jane, was born in February, 1867, the fourth of the Woods' seven children.

37. Sarah. I am confused about the identity of this Sarah, unless it refers to the older sister of Mary Wood, Sarah Shoemaker (Note 4). The genealogy refers to her as having only one son, however.

38. Aaron. Aaron Van Dorn, younger brother of Earl Van Dorn, born two years after Earl almost to the day. Little is known about Aaron, and he is perhaps one of the most enigmatic members of the six members of his generation who lived to adulthood. Researchers on the early history of Death Valley, Calif., however, have contacted me seeking more information and sharing with me what they have. They say this man had some talent as a cartographer and the earliest official maps of that bleak region of the country were drawn by Aaron Van Dorn about 1857, when he accompanied an Army expedition into that area for the purpose of mapping it. The originals of Aaron Van Dorn's maps are in the National Archives, according to these people. The mention of the "exploring expedition" confirms something of what the non-family researchers have said. The genealogy gives Aaron's death ca. 1874, while the researchers say he died in San Francisco at least five years later. At any rate, he never married, lived apart from the family, and communicated little.

One other note from the researchers has it that Aaron Van Dorn, for a time a resident of Falmouth, Va., and was exchanged as a prisoner of war sometime in 1862. He was an enlisted man in the Confederate Army for a time.

I have in my possession a 19th-century edition of Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography which has Aaron Van Dorn's autograph on the end-papers. Apart from what is contained in the estate packet of Peter Aaron Van Dorn, I have no other primary documents concerning Aaron Van Dorn.

[The letter is from the Murray J. Smith Collection in the U. S. Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. It is a typed transcription of a handwritten letter. The annotations to the letter were written 12-16 July 1993 by Edgar Crisler (deceased) of Port Gibson, Miss., who located the letter. It was brought to our attention by Tybring Hemphill. None

of the misprints, misspellings, or antiquated spellings were altered. An error in the numbering of the footnotes was corrected.]