



Exploration of Francis W. Eppes (1801-1881)

Cole Spires

Dr. Benjamin Gunter, FSU School of Communication, Idy Codington



Abstract

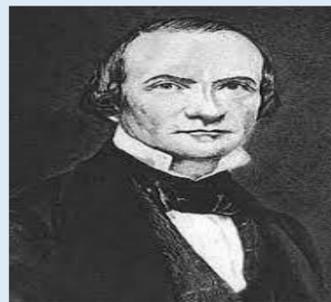
Francis Eppes was an important figure in Territorial Florida. Eppes came from a prestigious family that included Thomas Jefferson, and like his grandfather Thomas, Eppes valued public service. Eppes was one of the founders of the St. John's Episcopal Church in Tallahassee and later was tasked with finding a new reverend for the church. Eppes also helped found the "Seminary West of the Suwannee River," the school that would eventually become Florida State University. Eppes also served as mayor of Tallahassee. But Eppes was not without controversy. Recently, backlash from Eppes' history of slave-owning has hurt his legacy. This project focused on Eppes' own writings preserved in FSU Libraries' special collections, along with works written about him from the time period. Letters transcribed add detailed evidence of Eppes' devotion to his faith, his children, and his community. But like all historical figures, there remains much to be explored about Francis Eppes.

Background and Purpose

Francis Eppes was a prominent man who left his mark on Tallahassee. Many of Eppes' contributions are still around to this day, so the goal of this project was to shine a light on a forgotten aspect of the history of Tallahassee. The research project utilized many types of sources to find this info.

Methods

- Preliminary reading of *Red White and Bluebloods*, (Malcolm Johnson 1976) to explore various characters from territorial Florida.
- Identifying interesting characters and briefly learn about their lives
- Choosing an individual and doing a deep dive on their life
- Reading transcribed primary documents and using these as a "Rosetta Stone" to transcribe a primary document.
- From the primary document, "My Dear Nic" (1864), find some interesting aspects of Francis Eppes' life and dig into those.



Results

- This project collected and transcribed primary documents that shed light on the character of Francis Eppes, particularly as a man of faith, a farmer, and a father. While it was known that Eppes was devoted to his faith, we learned that he felt a stronger allegiance to God than to the Confederate States. He makes it known to his son that God is first. Eppes wrote, "though a soldier of the confederacy you owe a higher allegiance to...combat sin and evil in every shape and degree."
- Some info about Eppes' later life was also learned. Eppes was a big shot in Tallahassee, but for whatever reason decided to move to Central Florida. In Central Florida, Eppes was a farmer growing a variety of crops like "Sorghum" and "Cotton". What is interesting to us is that this seems like a step-down, but in early Florida, the ability to fall back on farming was an accomplishment.
- We knew Eppes was a father but did not know if he was a good father. Through his personal letter, we learned that Eppes tried to use his influence and connections, to land his son a cushier job in the Confederate army. Eppes' letter reads " If you think I can bring any influences to bear in the matter, write me word...procure...situation on Hardee's staff...I immediately appealed to Col. Scott to use his influence...get Willy Pool to use his influence."

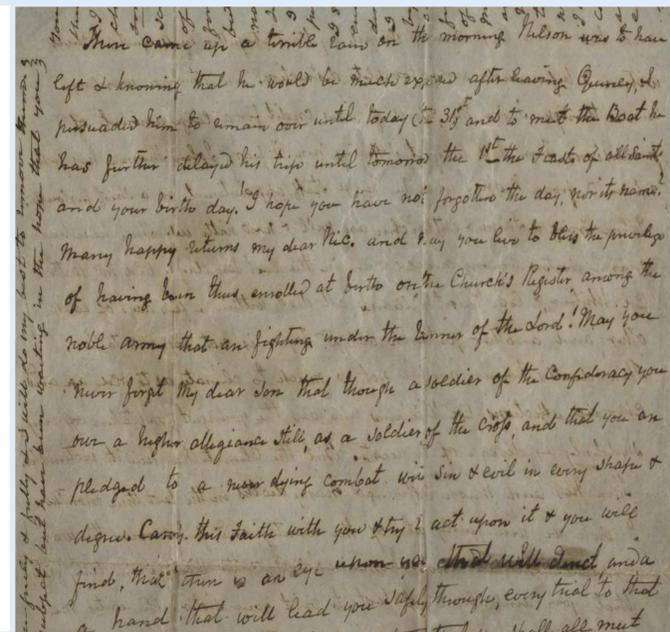
Conclusion

Francis Eppes was a complex man. This project only scratched the surface of Eppes' life and there remains much to be discovered, about his personal life and his role as a public figure. Like most memorable people from the past, he had many admirable traits and some that taint his reputation to this day. These contradictions make him interesting -- a good subject for research, and a promising character to put onstage.

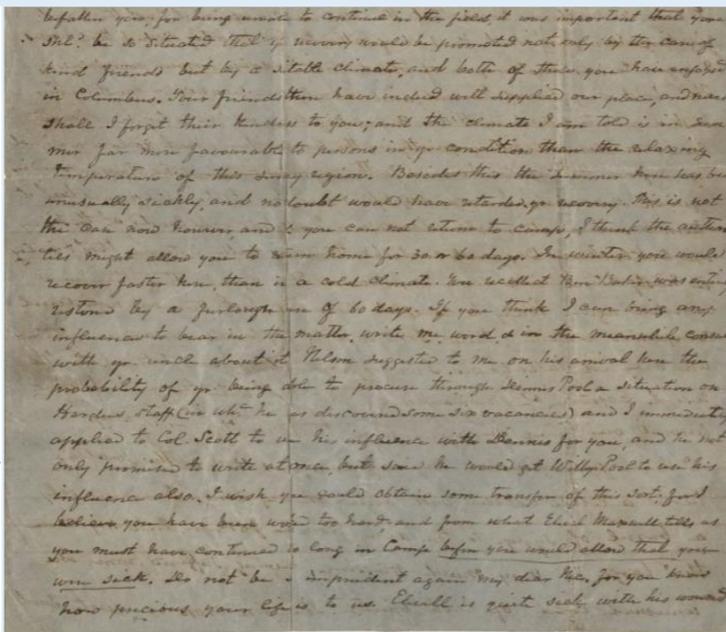
Transcript " My Dear Nic"

P.S. Your uncle Willie at P.O. Farmersville and P. Edward, I have just heard from Aunt Mary of Ellington to the enquire, & find much. There came up a terrible rain on the morning Nelson was to have left & knowing that he would be much exposed (?) after leaving Quincy, I persuaded him to remain over until today (the 31st) and to meet the Boat he has further delayed his trip until tomorrow the 1st - the Feast of all Saints and your birthday. I hope you have not forgotten the day, nor its name. Many happy returns my dear Nic. and may you live to bless the privilege of having been thus enrolled at birth on the Church's Register among the noble army that are fighting under the banner of the Lord! May you never forget my dear son that though a soldier of the Confederacy you owe a higher allegiance still, as a soldier of the Cross, and that you are pledged to a never dying combat with sin & evil in every shape & degree. Carry this Faith with you & try to act upon it & you will find, that there is an eye upon you that will direct, and a hand that will lead you safely through, every trial to that heavenly home. When I pray and hope that we shall meet never to again. Would that be? This hope my dear for as you ought.

"My Dear Nic" 1864 10-27



place and never shall I forget their kindness to you. And the climate I am told is in summer more favorable to a person in your condition than the temperatures of this sunny region. Besides this, the summer has not been unusually sickly, and no doubt would have retarded you. This is not the case now, however, and you cannot return to. I think the authorities might allow you to come home for 0 days. In winter, you would recover faster here than in a cold climate. You'll recollect that Baker was entirely by a furlough of 60 days. If you think I can bring any influences to bear in the matter, write my word. Write to your uncle about it. Nelson suggested to me on his arrival the probability of us being able to procure a situation on Hardee's staff. (in which he has discovered vacancies) and I immediately appealed to Col. Scott to use his influence with Dennis for you. And he not only promised to write at once but said he would Willy Pool, to use his influence also. I wish you could obtain some sort of transfer of this sorry. For I believe you have been worked too hard, and from what E? Maxwell tells us you must have continued too long in the camp before you would allow that you were sick. Do not be so improvident again my dear Nic, for you know how precious your life is to us. Elwell is quite sick with his



References

- http://purl.flvc.org/fsu/fd/FSU_MSS0204_B01_F01_17
http://purl.flvc.org/fsu/fd/FSU_MSS0204_B01_F03_13 <https://archives.lib.fsu.edu/repositories/10/resources/1413>