

L'Engle's Letter 1861 From 'The Farm'

by Phil Eschbach

The following transcription is from the enclosed four-page letter.

Dear Mr McCrady,

You already know the heavy affliction which our Heavenly father has seen fit to lay upon us, and that, great and terrible as was that affliction in itself, the further aggravation it rec'd from the painful intelligence which accompanied the announcement of my dear William's death: that the fatal mistake which caused the loss of his precious life originated with himself. But God be praised who has merciful removed that dreadful sting by causing the exact truth to come out, through a letter received lately from Mr. Mallory, who says most explicitly and emphatically, "The Apothecary misread the prescription, and he fell a victim to the error." Although it can make no difference in the result, still there is comfort in knowing that his own hand did not cause his death. Madeleine as well as ourselves, is very anxious that this fact should be generally known & thus clear every blot from his professional reputation, a profession of which he was so fond and so proud & to which he was certainly an honor & an ornament.



I feel so sure of your sympathy that I make no apology for writing to you and sending you a copy of Mr Mallory's letter, feeling assured that you will endeavor to correct the impression which has already gone forth & make the exact truth known, & to clear away every blot from his hitherto unclouded professional reputation. It may seem like a small thing, but as Madeleine very justly remarks, one of his own little boys at some future day may wish to follow their father's profession, and such an impression having gone abroad & remaining unremoved would operate against him, besides which as I said before, there is a satisfaction in knowing that he did not do it.

The druggist, or his clerk, careless as he was, & ignorant as he must be, & unfit for so responsible a place, still I am sorry for him, for if he has any feeling he must feel (tho' he may never know the extent of) the misery he has caused, he has my forgiveness & my prayers.

Poor Madeleine & the children will remain with us sometime longer. It is quiet here, & she seems to dread the idea of traveling when he can no longer watch over her every comfort. I see nothing but trouble & sorrow on every side—My sons, Edward, John (and Jaquelin Daniel, Emily's husband) are expecting to be ordered to Virginia in a few days, and the poor little wife & mother (Emily) [is] not able to sit up, & my poor Mary too is in miserable health, the shock of her brother's death almost destroyed her.

Please do give my kindest love to Posey & every member of the family.

Your sincerely attached friend,

Susan L'Engle | The Farm | June, 1861

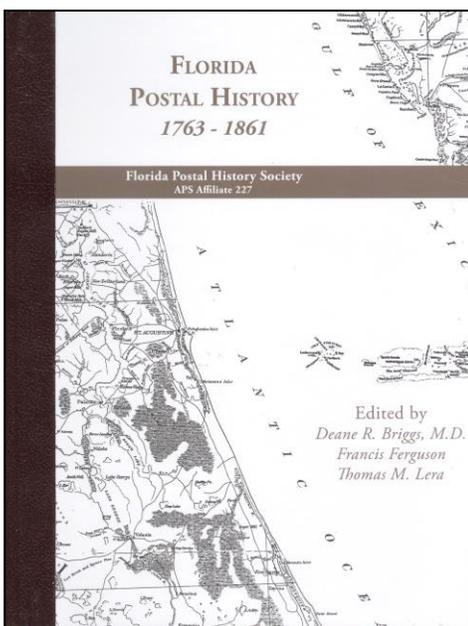
Background Notes:

Friends Edward McCrady and William Johnson lived only a few doors from each other in Charleston at the time they were arrested and sent to St. Augustine in 1780. Later their children married (John McCrady married Jane Johnson). The Johnson & McCrady families remained good friends and in close contact for generations. Jane had a brother William, who, like John McCrady, went to Princeton c. 1790. John McCrady and his brother-in-law William had a law firm together.

The horrible and bloody Haitian revolution of 1791-1804, virtually extinguished the white ruling class of the island, but some educated, and formerly wealthy whites managed to escape to America (like modern-day Cuban refugees), usually with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. Among them were some members of the L'Engle family, and thus we find in Charleston two children, John and Madeline L'Engle, up for adoption. They were taken in by William Johnson and his wife (Sarah Bennett), who eventually had eight other children of their own. To complicate things further, John McCrady died in 1793 in his twenties, and his only son, Edward McCrady, born 1802, was likewise taken in by the William Johnson household (McCrady's mother's brother's family) and was raised together with all those first cousins and the two adopted L'Engle cousins as well (no doubt a very busy household!). Edward was so close to "cousin" John L'Engle that the latter eventually named his own son Edward McCrady L'Engle (a name repeated in several generations, right down to a stained-glass window in the cathedral at Jacksonville, Florida, even though technically no McCrady blood went with it). The well-known author, Madeleine L'Engle, descends also from this line.

The 1861 letter is from Susan L'Engle, wife of Edward McCrady L'Engle, living in Jacksonville. It is respectfully addressed inside to Mr. McCrady (no first name) and signed as his "sincerely attached friend" (actually an in-law to an Edward McCrady L'Engle who is not actually related by blood to her husband). Susan signs as though it were written at "The Farm." The cover is postmarked from Jacksonville, Florida, June 18, and shows the addressee to be Edward McCrady, the lawyer in Charleston, South Carolina, a man she grew up with. A note added to the cover, in Edward McCrady's handwriting, identifies the content as notification of Dr. William L'Engle's death, William being Susan's brother-in-law and a "stepbrother" (by adoption) of McCrady's Johnson cousins.

The family were evidently already in summer residence at "The Farm," given that the cover comes from Florida. The term, "The Farm" in South Carolina is often referenced as a retreat in the family correspondence of this period.



Editor's note: For those that have an interest in Florida postal history this 400+ page book in full color is considered the go to reference. A very small number of books are still available (less than five) at the price of \$85 and can be ordered directly from the website. Please consider being a member of this Society that publishes a full color Journal three times a year and connects you with other like-minded collectors of Florida postal history. We have a number of members of the CFSC who members of the Florida Postal History Society.

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