THE QUEEN’S LADY IN TEXAS

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When the Honorable Amelia Matilda Murray, maid of honor to Queen Victoria, arrived in New Orleans in 1855 on a grand tour of the United States, Canada, and Cuba, she determined to pay a visit to Texas. “You will think me adventurous to undertake this,” she wrote friends in England, “but these new countries are so interesting to a person fond of Natural History and fine scenery, that one makes up one’s mind to undergo some inconvenience and difficulty.”

With that the sixty-year-old Miss Murray boarded the steamer Louisiana for Galveston. Arriving on April 16, she began a ten-day swing through Texas which took her by steamer up Buffalo Bayou to Houston, by stage coach to Washington, Independence, Huntsville, Crockett, Nacogdoches, and thence to Natchitoches, Louisiana, where she took a steamboat back to New Orleans. Miss Murray proved an indefatigable, uncomplaining traveler and a true Texan at heart. She traveled over corduroy roads where stumps were often a foot high, and, if this were not test enough of her endurance, she spent a day on horseback, riding from Independence along Yegua Creek to see a petrified forest and some Indian mounds. At the end of her tour she declared that, with the possible exception of the highlands of Virginia, she preferred Texas to any other place in the United States. In all fairness it must be conceded that her visit coincided with one of the seasons of the year when Texas has its best foot forward.

Amelia Matilda Murray was born in 1795, the fourth daughter of Lord George Murray, bishop of Saint David’s. Her mother was appointed lady-in-waiting to Princesses Augusta and Elizabeth in 1808, and the young girl attracted the attention of the royal family by her brightness. One of the intimate friends of her early years was Annabella Milbanke, the future Lady Byron.

Shortly after the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837, Miss Murray was appointed maid of honor to the Queen, a position which gave full play to her many interests. She was fascinated by the study of botany and was gifted at sketching. She also had a lively interest in politics, but, most of all, she was interested in the reforms of her era—penal, insane asylum, educational, women’s rights, and, above all, abolition. Abolition was uppermost in her mind when she arrived in the United States on her grand tour, and it was the issue that cost her her position as maid of honor. Her biographer, Gordon Goodwin, says that she was a zealous abolitionist and that she resigned as maid of honor because in that position she could not speak as she desired on the issue, a political question. It is evident, however, that Goodwin either had not read her Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada or that he misstated the case. Miss Murray arrived in the United States deeply interested in the problem of slavery and with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin fresh on her mind, but during the course of her tour she was thoroughly converted to the Southern point of view. “There is an obvious and irremovable dissimilarity between the white
and black race," she concluded. "The blacks are children of larger growth." Miss Murray’s unexpected support of slavery dismayed English reformers and cost her many friendships. If, as Goodwin says, she resigned as maid of honor so that she could speak her mind freely on abolition, it was not because she favored abolition but because she opposed it. She resigned as maid of honor in 1856 but was immediately appointed extra woman of the bedchamber, a position she held until she died, almost blind, at the age of eighty-nine on June 7, 1884.

Miss Murray’s position opened all the important doors to her in the United States. She visited Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and he held an umbrella over her head while she completed a sketch in the rain; President and Mrs. Franklin Pierce, grieving for their dead child, received her; Jessie Benton Fremont invited her to see a series of daguerreotypes which John C. Fremont had brought from the Rocky Mountains; and at a pleasant Washington party attended by “all the notabilities” she received invitations from various congressmen to visit their states. One invitation was to visit Texas, and Sam Houston undoubtedly issued it, for Miss Murray later recalled that his home was at Independence and decided to visit there instead of continuing to Austin.

Throughout her American tour Miss Murray showed a zest for new experiences. When she criticized, she did so good-naturedly and with permission from her American friends to abuse them a little. The idleness of well-to-do American women along the eastern seaboard irritated her. She called them playthings and wrote that their everlasting rocking in rocking chairs made her a little seasick. When one woman dared to mention the American Revolution, Miss Murray hastened to assure her that no one in the British Isles troubled himself about the War of American Independence except “to think his ancestors unwise for having fought about it.” She was contemptuous of the pretensions of the American upper classes but appreciative of basic pioneer qualities.

In the same period that Miss Murray paid her brief visit to Texas, Frederick Law Olmsted made an extensive tour, collecting material for his book which became a standard work on Texas in the 1850’s. In the same year Eliza Griffin Johnston with three young children traveled with an army train from Kansas to the Texas Indian frontier, camping at night and huddling by an open fire to keep from freezing. The three travelers saw Texas from three entirely different viewpoints, but the two women had much in common. Both delighted in Texas wild flowers, and both were artists. More important, they shared basic qualities of character which Eliza Johnston’s stepson defined as high courage, strength, and endurance. It is apparent from the Honourable Amelia Matilda Murray’s account of her trip to Texas that if she had not been the Queen’s lady, she would have made a good frontier army wife.

Galveston, Texas, U.S.
April 17, 1855

My Dear Friends,

I ought to have sent my last packet from New Orleans instead of which, owing to hurry, I have brought it here from whence I am afraid its dispatch be more distant and less secure. After a passage of thirty-six hours we arrived
here last night. Although the weather was very fine, there was a swell of the
waves, which made the majority of the passengers unhappy. R says she was worse than in crossing the Atlantic. I was not positively ill, but rather
uncomfortable yesterday; and as I hear of a mail route from Austin, the capital of this State, via Natchitoches and the Red River, I mean to return to New Orleans that way, we shall then only have three or four hundred miles of a river steamer instead of the sea-voyage. But it has only been by falling with a gentleman living in that territory that I have ascertained the possibility of a land journey. I was told even by Texas resident at New Orleans that there were no conveyances; but arrangements in these new countries are so rapid that circumstances one year ago may have been all changed in the last few months. As yet I have only looked out of the window of the Fremont Hotel. This seems a clean, flat, sandy place; the houses irregularly built, and all of plank, but comfortable-looking, as these wooden houses are, unless they are set on a blaze.

There are many savage tribes to the northeast of this State, but the theatre of the present war between the United States and the Indians is one thousand miles off. Beyond Austin, there are Comanches, Pawnees, Ksawys, Cherokees, and Creeks, and towards Missouri, the Osages; but the Choctaws, which tribe borders upon the Red River and the settled lands, are the gentlest and most civilized of all these nations; so, while the other tribes are in a way to becoming extinct, the Choctaws keep up their numbers. They boast that they have never embraced their hands in the blood of any white man. They have comfortable houses and a settled polity—sheriffs, etc., etc.; and there is an idea of some day admitting them as a State into the Union. I saw one of them attending the educational convention at Washington in European dress, and looking like a gentleman. I should like to visit that people...

The distance from hence to New Orleans by sea is about four hundred miles. Galveston is an island. I have just returned from a drive along some fine sands which extend for miles upon the flat shore, where there must be excellent bathing. The population of the town appears to be a mixture of Germans, Dutch, French, English, and Americans. Almost all the tradespeople I spoke to were of the first-mentioned nation. I was surprised to see such a number of hairdressers in proportion to the size of the place; there are three within a stone's-throw of our hotel,—"Hyppolite and Batiste," from Paris! where hair is "instantly dyed," and wigs, toupees, and fronts are well made, etc. etc. Artificial proceedings for outward adornment which are now little practiced in France and England, appear to have emigrated to this side the Atlantic.

Washington, Texas, Thursday, April 19. We left Galveston in the Houston steamer at four o'clock to go fifty miles up the bay and forty miles up the bayou to Houston. These bayous are very curious. I observed one of them at New Orleans, but not having ascended it in a boat, I was not fully, aware what odd sea-ditches they are. They must be peculiar to this coast—I never heard of them elsewhere—and I imagine their navigation is one of the most singular in the world. It was a bright starlight night when we ascended that which leads from Galveston Bay inland. I sat upon the prow of the vessel, with another lad, from eight o'clock until midnight, too much interested to think of either fatigue or damp. Our steamer, near two hundred feet long, was navigated the whole way through a channel hardly more than eighty feet wide, though deep enough
to float a man-of-war. Negroes holding braziers of blazing pine-wood, stood on each side the vessel, illuminating our passage, the foliage and even the beautiful flowers so near that we could almost gather them as we floated by; a small bell was ringing every instant, to direct our engineers; one moment the larboard paddle, then the starboard, was stopped or set in motion, or the wheels were altogether standing still, while we swung round the narrow corners of this tortuous channel; the silence of the bordering forests broken alone by the sobs of our high-pressure engine, which is less expensive in construction, and enables a vessel to draw less water than a low pressure. Now and then a night bird, or frog croaking with a voice like that of a watchman’s rattle, accompanied the bells and the escape valve. But human voices were awed into silence during our solemn progress, which seemed to me to belong neither to the sea nor the earth—it was, indeed, a kind of amphibious proceeding. A downward steamer once passed us: I was glad we did not meet at one of the narrowest places, for there, I believe, they sometimes edge by one another, absolutely touching; but this navigation, however extraordinary, is considered peculiarly safe. The depth of the water being so great and so still, it is difficult to understand how these bayous have been formed. They are deep trenches running up into the interior—Nature’s canals—no streams come in at the termination, and the water is always salt or brackish."

In two or three hours after our arrival at Houston, we were obliged to get into the mail coach for this place; so, coming in the dark and setting out before daylight, I know little of Houston. It is said to be pretty, but must be flat, for soon after leaving it we entered upon prairies which extended for fifty miles; fine grass and beautiful flowers, fertile though sandy plains. Once or twice, when we stopped to water the horses, I got out for a few minutes, and while the rest of the party dined, I rushed back to gather what I could; but it was very tantalizing to me to pass all kinds of new plants without being able to possess myself of them. In the few opportunities afforded me, I got about twenty: one or two of genera, and the others of species, either unknown or little known in our gardens.

It was ten o’clock last night before we reached Washington: the driver declared we must start again at three this morning, so I rebelled, and have let the mail proceed to Austin without us. I must give up that capital, however picturesque the scenery may be and content myself with visiting General Samuel Houston, at Independence, twelve miles farther than this place, and then turn back towards the Red River. It is useless to run through a greater extent of country without pausing long enough to see it; and we must be back at New Orleans by the end of the month.

The route here from the sea-shore is very thinly peopled—no towns no villages; and only an occasional settlement here and there, mostly Dutch. After leaving the prairies we came to a very pretty district, resembling English park scenery; fine scattered trees and woods with the brightest and most luxuriant verdure I have seen in America. At times the oaks and the sand reminded me of Kent; but these oaks are not the same species as ours, yet are the Texans fine trees. The dwarf “Black Jack” is abundant all about. We passed the Brazos River in a ferry-boat, left for the convenience of the public, without a ferryman. It was large enough to admit the coach and four horses, with the pass-
engers, who got out, and a rope guided the whole across a quiet narrow river. . . .

As we came along, one of the gentleman passengers, at my request, caught a singular little reptile for me, which is here called the horned frog, but it has a tail, and is not more like a frog than the gelsemine is like jessamine. I shall try to reconcile it to live and become my fellow-traveller.

Since I wrote the above, I have been spending two days at a small town called Independence, and there a boy gave me another of these creatures, which will be a companion to the first; and I hope to get them safely to England, offering to Mr. Owen. Yesterday they both eloped from a tin box; so as nothing in the shape of a cage could be procured, I went to a store, bought a large metal sieve, and persuaded a carpenter to let it into a circular piece of wood, grandly enough made of the cedar, which is used for common purposes in this country: the carpenter’s shop was perfumed by its shavings. The sieve, with the sand at the bottom, is an airy and pleasant abode for my prisoners; and I can watch their evolutions without difficulty; they seem gentle, harmless little things, and being crustaceous and not slippery-feeling, I have no objection to them. Their appearance is most antediluvian, with their fringes and horns, and birdy-expression of countenance.

I spent two pleasant days at Independence, where I boarded and myself in the clean, though simple abode of a Mr. and Mrs. Holmes. He is building a house, in which he means to receive boarders and travellers. In the meanwhile (although Mrs. Holmes was occupied with an infant only a fortnight old) he gave up his own parlour—a canvas and boarded room, covered by a nice clean mat with a door opening at once upon the high road; a couch for my bed, and muslin curtains—half crimson, half white—across the windows. This room was quite free from the odour of tobacco, and very neat.

I called upon Mrs. Houston, and found that the General is absent at Huntsville; but I was invited to take tea, and I spent the greater part of my time with Mrs. Houston and her pleasant family-party; she was so kind as to lend me an excellent horse, by which means I saw much of the neighbourhood; and this morning I rode twelve miles across the Awah River, and swamp, to seek for a fossilised forest and for flowers. A gentleman accompanied me who was an excellent backwoodsman and guide. We crossed the swamp and river, which would have been impassible during a less dry season; and before long we saw a wolf, and a singular bird, called a water-turkey; it has a head and form resembling that bird, but it has also web feet, and such a power of remaining under water that it will dive for ten minutes at a time. We soon came to a petrified forest, which is said to be ten miles in extent. I found fine specimens of fossil-wood, whole trunks of trees, and large branches. The weight of a bullock-wagon passing along a track, had crushed one of these fossil trees, and I gathered up some specimens. All these stone trunks lie prostrate.

Further on, three mocassin snakes lay basking upon some mud in the channel of a small river, below our path; they looked venomous, though inert; and I felt glad to be fairly out of their way. A pretty small pair of deer’s horns had been dropped near a bush, and I persuaded my guide to pick them up, but he having no great liking for unnecessary trouble, hung them upon a tree, with an
assurance that we must pass the same way in returning; but he forgot this, and returned a mile to the right, so I lost them after all. Though the weather was sultry, and our ride was tiring for the horses, they would not touch water at any of the lesser streams we crossed because (Mr. D said) wild beasts, such as panthers, wolves, and bears, had drunk there. We saw the tracks of such animals, but there is no danger of meeting them, as they take care to get out of your way. The only beings who crossed our path during this long ride were a gentlemanly-looking boy, about twelve years old, accompanied by two negroes, all on horseback; they were seeking horses which had strayed in the forest. We went as far as some ancient Indian mounds; and I found Phlox Drummondi, indigenous, upon a small sandy prairie; in colour a dark ruby, very beautiful; each plant was a small annual, not more than half a foot high, yet I conclude it is the original of all ours. We got back safely to Independence by three o'clock, having been on horseback since five in the morning, but I had been too well amused to think about fatigue.

Huntsville, Sunday, April 22. This is a pretty scattered town. We left Independence yesterday evening, slept at Washington, and came on the mail at three o'clock this morning. The Brazos was again to be crossed in a ferry boat. A mile from thence one of the horses became ill, but after laying down almost immovable for a quarter of an hour, he got up and went twelve miles without any apparent difficulty. About half way we met General Houston on horseback, attended by his negro groom. Nearly all the country between Washington and this place is fine rich prairie land, interspersed with picturesque oaks; it resembles Somerselshire, Kent, and Winsor Forest by turns; the grass abundant, and beautifully green. We saw some deer; and, at one place in the water again, two of those poisonous mocassin snakes; I also heard of bears and panthers, and of a black snake, a kind of boa, ten feet long, which moves with great rapidity, and throws itself upon deer and cattle, and has been known (though rarely) to follow and attack people. We reached this place just before sunset.

At a small log-house, in a lonely situation, a ladylike woman and her child, a girl about ten years old, got into the carriage. We were surprised to learn that, in the absence of her son of seventeen, for college attendance, this lady lived entirely alone with her daughter; she had learned to fire off a gun, in case of emergency, but she confesses that the alarm and uneasiness consequent upon her lonely life is more than she can bear much longer. The roads here are by no means bad; we had a very comfortable coach, well-horsed, and well-driven, and there is really no difficulty whatever, except fatigue, in traversing this part of the country.

Crockett, Texas, Tuesday, April 24. We left Huntsville by half-past six yesterday morning, and arrived here by moonlight early in the evening. With the exception of scenery at Trinity River (which we crossed, as usual, in a large ferry boat), the drive today (through deep sand, and in swampy places upon shifting corduroy roads) was monotonous and uninteresting; we had three companions in the mail, rough-looking, but courteous, well informed men; all of them Texan agriculturists; one had served in Florida in the Seminole war, and had lived much among the Indians; another, a bright-looking young man, was returning to his farm and a father eighty years old, after two years wandering upon the frontier line of Mexico, hunting and shooting. He had been among companions
who could not persuade him to accompany them to California; but he said a wild life had great charms for him, and that he should find it difficult to settle down at home. He thinks Texas the finest State in the Union, as it is the largest in point of extent; and that railroads and more people are all it wants. We passed many cotton plantations during our journey today, and large numbers of cattle, apparently of the Holderness or the Durham breed. Dairies are little thought about; it is cultivating beef, and oxen for draught, which is the object, not milk, cream, or butter. One hardly ever sees cream in America—never in this State.

Upon arriving at an hotel, or rather tavern, in Texas, one is shown into a room where the mistress (usually very young) acknowledges the arrival of visitors, and offers a chair; but it would be quite beneath her dignity to go with you to your room or even to see that you have necessary comforts; she "will desire the servants to attend." After a while a negro girl, or perhaps two or three, will show you a bed chamber, and hang about to watch you and your packages; and it is usually necessary to scold or speak sharply before they will bestir themselves to "fix the chamber;" and if you are not careful to put your things out of the reach of curiosity, a bevy will assemble as soon as your back is turned, to amuse themselves with your cap, bonnet, or perhaps your combs and brushes.

The "lady" sits at the head of the table at tea or supper, but it seems quite an offence if you suppose she knows anything about the bill, or even respecting modes of travelling or distances: to any such inquiries she will say that "You must ask at the office," or "Inquire of Mr. So-and-so"—she knows nothing of such things. So, though the blacks make good servants if they are strictly disciplined and well watched, yet at these hotels they are careless and troublesome beyond measure. Twice during this tour, when the night departure of the mail allowed passengers but an hour or two of rest, I was just asleep when a black woman would come screaming at the doors waking me, saying she wanted to come to "find the blacking-brush which is left under your bed, missus," or to "look for a quilt," probably to use as a table cloth, or it may be only an excuse to gain entrance. I positively refuse to let them in, but then I am completely aroused, and there is small chance of sleep afterwards.

Friday, April 27. On board the Rapides, Red River, Alexandria. After our long fatiguing journey, we are fortunate in getting accommodation in this comfortable steamer, which will take us down the Red River to the Mississippi, and so back to New Orleans.

Alexandria, Monday morning, April 30. I go back to say that we arrived at this place by moonlight, after four days and nights hard travelling, but in coaches so good and so well appointed that, although the roads were very rough and dusty, we had no cause to be frightened, except in passing the loose plank bridges, most of them with no pretence of a rail to prevent vehicles and horses from going over the sides; but we were assured that accidents are of rare occurrence, and these coaches have such fine horses, and such admirable drivers, that I never travelled at night with such confidence as through the wild forests and natural roads of Texas. As yet there is no other road-making than cutting down trees actually in the way, the stumps of which are often left a foot high, to be shunned by the driver and horses, who learn from experience how to avoid them even in the dark.
After Crockett, we left the more open country; but all the way to Huntsville the soil is a red sand, with rolling hills covered by rich forests, but the timber is not so thickly set as to be drawn up without leaves or branches; and we only occasionally passed through a pine barren. Natchitoches is a very pretty town; the houses with nice gardens, and the drive through open woods, containing a great variety of trees, for some miles along a raised terrace, from which one sees a fine hilly country in every direction, is very interesting, until you come to that which my fellow travellers informed me was the most beautiful twenty miles of all, and then I was rather disappointed to find that its beauty consisted only in rich land, and fertile cotton, sugar, and maize fields.

Upon reaching a bayou which falls into the Red River, we drive along the shore of its muddy slow stream—at present so low from the long drought, that it is like a great ugly ditch, with snake fences and acres of red flat fields on our left. I thought of the American who considered Salisbury Plain the most lovely district in England. Part of the former picturesque tract is dotted by cotton in plantations and comfortable looking abodes. We saw occasionally gangs of people at work in the fields, under a driver, but all seemed contented and merry. I pitied the overseer, who sat idle upon his horse, and thought I should prefer being one of the labourers. The black women generally dislike being taken as house-servants; they prefer the work and the more general society of the fields.\textsuperscript{31} We saw two mocassion snakes in the water—one large snake, which is only accused of eating up chickens, and another big enough to be a boa.

Several rivers were crossed during the day: Angelina, Black River, and Bayou Sabine.\textsuperscript{32} This would be a very favourable path for emigrants into Texas, as a hilly country is less liable to fevers, and the people would be more easily acclimated. A Mr. Hall at New Orleans is spoken of as an excellent adviser for new settlers. Such adventurers should arrive before December, come straight up the Red River from the Mississippi as far as Alexandria, from whence they would easily reach a favourable locality. A party of thirty emigrants, who could purchase about three hundred acres of ready cleared land for about 60 l. and divide it among them, would have a much better chance of immediate comfort and prosperity than any one individual taking the whole quantity; and if there is a carpenter among them, he would be the most successful of all. I should much prefer settling in Texas to any other part of the Union I have seen, unless it was the Highlands of Virginia.\textsuperscript{33} There is certainly more chance of fevers in the South; but if people come in the early part of the winter and are not imprudent, they will be tolerably safe. Game abounds here and fish in all the streams.

I have at last ascertained what is meant by the Chinquapin—a nut which has been frequently mentioned, but till now I could never fit any tree to the name. It looks like a chestnut of a small delicate kind. I have discovered that it is the \textit{Castanea pumila}.\textsuperscript{34} In a rich prairie, some miles beyond Independence, beyond the district called Atewa, I found a beautiful phlox of a rich velvety crimson. It may be that one described in Darby’s \textit{Botany of the Southern States} as “pilosa,” or the original Drummondi, but I should call it crimson not purple. It appears to be confined to the locality above named. I have not seen or heard of it anywhere else. A few miles south of Independence, a beautiful bright sky-blue \textit{Ixia}-looking flower, unlike any \textit{Sisyrinchium} I ever saw, though I think it
must be one. Texas can hardly yet have been thoroughly botanized, so that it is not impossible for me to fall in with new plants.

I brought the two little Crustaceans on my lap all the way from Washington. They appear in good health and tolerably well content with their sieve. I think that they must be examples of the reptile creation (as the family of Alligator Cars are among the fishes) of forms which are generally by-gone. They occasionally accept a fly as food, and I am told they will eat ants and ant-eggs, but, like tortoises, they seem very independent of meals, and quite as well content without as with them. Fear does not appear to seem a trait in their character. They do not try to escape from my hands, or to suffer from being taken hold of. Their little horns and bony excrecences are, I suppose, considered sufficient defence. They are the gentlest and least aggressive creatures I ever met with.

We are hospitably sheltered on board the Rapides, but she has engagements which will detain her here till tomorrow morning, so I must be content in the meanwhile to make acquaintance with mocking-birds, "whip-poor-wills," alligators and fireflies, all of which abound on the Red River; and I have also found one or two more flowers new to me, by walking on shore this afternoon. On the shore, too, I saw trails of snakes across a sandy path. One must have been very large; but as we kept the road we were not afraid, for these reptiles generally get out of the way of intruders.

Saturday, April 28. We began moving down the Red River, towards the Mississippi. The two days before, our steamer was occupied taking in freight—cotton, sugar, and molasses—and a large portion was put into a barge attached to the Rapides, to prevent her drawing too much water in passing a shallow. When that was accomplished, the additional cargo was shipped, and the barge left behind. Alligators were plentiful along the shore today; pretty white cranes and occasional water turkeys accompanied our passage. A gentleman on board described a bird he had shot in the neighbourhood of Red River, which must resemble the Apteryx from Australia, to be seen in the Regent's Park Zoological Gardens, except that it is smaller.

Before the junction with the Mississippi, the Red River opens out into what is called Old River, because it is believed to be an ancient bed of the Mississippi. We have now got into the main channel of the latter stream; but its shores have not yet become flat and uninteresting, for we are still in the rolling country of red sand, from which the Red River derives its appellation and muddy complexion.

Monday, April 30. Just arrived by five o'clock at New Orleans, after a quiet and pleasant voyage. Nothing remarkable yesterday, except the town of Baton Rouge, which is prettily situated on the banks of the river. It boasts of the state house and a fort, and is considered the capital of Louisiana. I observe that the local governments generally hold their sittings at those places which in point of size are third rate. There is a certain jealousy of influence of large cities, which prevents them from being selected for legislative meetings. The Mississippi banks are much prettier about a hundred miles above New Orleans, where the chalky formation, which follows the alluvial, and precedes the red sandstone rocks in all the Southern States and in Cuba, begins to rise above flat plantations of cotton, maize, and sugar.
After leaving the Red banks, I saw no more alligators, though I believe they are occasionally to be found below. We have been fortunate in a bright moon, which has almost turned night into day. I have seen no fossils either before or after the red sand in Texas or Louisiana, but I daresay there may be some, as I have before found plenty of nummulites, echini, pectens, etc. I suppose all these formations are what the geologists call Eocene. I should like to speak of new chalk as distinguished from old chalk, for it seems pretty clear that they are made much after the same fashion, only the chalk of England is an elder brother, and has black flints and different fossils from the younger one, whose flints are brown; but I suppose this proposition is very ungeological. A gentleman here has given me specimens found in sinking the artesian well in New Orleans; and though it has been sunk nearly two hundred feet, still it produces only sea-sand, and broken or unbroken shells. The Mississippi appears to have travelled about a good deal in his time, and I should not wonder if some day he should take a fancy to join Lake Ponchartrain, and perhaps he may move across the city of New Orleans. I have seldom time to read over what I write, and therefore my letters may contain repetitions; if so, you must excuse them.

All I saw of slavery in Texas confirms previous conclusions. Workmen are so much wanted in that fine country, that it would seem impossible to abolish slave-labour, at any rate for many years to come: perhaps some Africans might be benefited and improved by being brought there. The old settled States are naturally unwilling to be troubled with fresh importations; but I think Texan agriculturists might be willing to take charge of them. It seems to me that kind and good people I have known do not yet understand the real bearings of this slavery question. I daresay in former times there were more abuses than at present: it is the slaveholders who come from North who prove the least patient and most severe masters; so I suppose abolitionists judge by what they know of them: Of course there are much stronger ties of affection between those whose immediate tie has been only a pecuniary one.

NOTES

"Miss Murray's account of her Texas trip appears in Amelia Matilda Murray, Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada (New York: G. P. Putnam and Company, 1856), 290-303. The author's spelling and punctuation have been retained unless otherwise indicated. Some change has been made in paragraphing.


An album of Mrs. Johnston’s paintings of Texas wild flowers, painted between the years 1843 and 1857, is in the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Museum, Austin. Miss Murray specialized in landscapes.

The roll off the coast of Galveston is attributed to the gradual slant of the Gulf plain into the Gulf of Mexico. Many travelers have complained of the roll. See Earl W. Formell, *The Galveston Era, the Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 6.

Miss Murray’s companion on the trip, apparently her maid.

The stage route was established in 1854 and was scheduled to run three times a week from Austin to Washington, Anderson, Huntsville, Crockett, Nacogdoches, San Augustine, and Natchitoches. Irene T. Allen, *Saga of Anderson* (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1957), 75. Miss Murray was either misinformed or misstated the distance from Natchitoches to New Orleans.

The original Tremont Hotel was built in 1837 at the corner of Twenty-Third and Post Office Streets and was torn down in 1861. It was a large rambling structure which was the most fashionable hotel in Galveston in the decades before the Civil War. Miss Murray’s fellow countrymen who stopped there usually commented on the mad haste of the meals at the Tremont and on the fact that after meals the gentlemen arranged themselves on the wide verandah in every bodily contortion while they read newspapers, chewed tobacco, and spat. Francis C. Sheridan, who visited Texas in 1839-1840, stayed at the Tremont in a room which he estimated to be about ten by fifteen feet in size and which he shared with five other men. In the same year that Miss Murray visited the Tremont, a Northern guest described conditions there by saying that “everything was in true Southern fashion, at sixes and sevens.” See Matilda C. Houstoun, *Texas and the Gulf of Mexico: or, Yachting in the New World* (2 vols.; London: John Murray, 1844), I, 271-273; Willis W. Pratt (ed.), *Galveston Island: or, A Few Months Off the Coast of Texas*, the *Journal of Francis C. Sheridan, 1839-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), 39-41; Ellen B. Ballou, “Scudder’s Journey to Texas, 1859,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (July 1959), 1-14; Ophia D. Smith, “A Trip to Texas in 1855,” *ibid.*, LIX (July 1955), 34-39; and letter of Mildred Stevenson, reference librarian, Rosenberg Library, to the writer, April 19, 1963. The Tremont is also treated in Richard A. Van Orman, *A Room for the Night: Hotels of the Old West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966).

Miss Murray’s information about Indians is garbled and incorrect. She was not so far removed from Indian warfare as she thought. The prolonged drought of the mid-1850’s, which both she and Olmsted mention, had made the plains barren and game scarce. That plus the advance of settlers had made the Indians of the plains bold, and in the year Miss Murray visited Texas Indians raided as far down as the Blanco River within twenty miles of Austin, her original destination. Later that year the crack Second Cavalry headed by Albert Sidney Johnston and Robert E. Lee was ordered to Texas to bring order to the frontier. For a firsthand view of the Texas Indian frontier, see Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, 295-306. See also, Carl Coke Rister, *Robert E. Lee in Texas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), passim; and William Preston Johnston, *The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 190-193.
Olmsted estimated that there were about thirty-five thousand Germans in Texas at the beginning of 1857. See Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, 428-441.


Olmsted reported that Houston showed many agreeable signs of accumulated wealth at the time of his visit. There were well-supplied shops, a large and good hotel, several neat churches, a theatre, and “a most remarkable number of showy bar-rooms and gambling saloons.” The principal thoroughfare led from the steamboat landing and was the busiest he saw in Texas. Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, 361-362. See also Pratt (ed.), *Galveston Island*, 112; Freund (ed.), *Dresel’s Houston Journal*, 31-42; and Walter Lord (ed.), *The Fremantle Diary, Being the Journal of Lieutenant Colonel Arthur James Lyon Fremantle, Coldstream Guards, or His Three Months in the Southern States* (Boston: Little Brown Company, 1954), 51.

Houston established a permanent residence in Independence in 1853, so that his children could have the educational advantages of Baylor University and so that his wife could be near her mother, Nancy Moffette Lea. Independence, founded as Coles Settlement in 1824, was a thriving town which considered itself the Athens of Texas in the 1850’s. See R. Henderson Shuffler, *The Houston’s at Independence* (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1966), 13-19; Gracey Booker Toland, *Austin Knew His Athens* (San Antonio: Naylor Company, 1958), *passim*; and F. T. Fields, *Texas Sketchbook* (Houston: Humble Oil and Refining Company, 1956), 30-35. The latter is notable for sketches of old Independence homes by E. M. Schiwetz.

Miss Murray was in the vicinity of the Brazos River near Hempstead. The black jack oak is usually found in dry, sandy soils in central Texas. See Robert A. Vines, *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of the Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960), 182-183.

Miss Murray probably crossed the Brazos at a ferry below the conjunction of the Brazos and the Navasota Rivers. Allen, *Saga of Anderson*, 75.

The horned frog, which is actually a lizard, genus *Phrynosoma*, was an unfailing attraction to visitors to Texas. The horned frog is found only in the western United States and Mexico in hot, dry, sandy areas. It is viviparous. Mary Austin Holley commented on the creature, and Olmsted mailed two home to New York. Neither Miss Murray nor these visitors, however, witnessed the most remarkable feat of the horned frog. Occasional specimens when handled will eject a jet of blood from the corneal of the eye. See Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, 312-313; Mary Austin Holley, *Texas* (Lexington, Kentucky: J. Clark and Company, 1836), 104; and Raymond Ditmars, *The Reptile Book* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1914) 143-159. Ditmars witnessed
the blood ejection from the eye under laboratory conditions and describes it in
detail. The occurrence is very rare.

Richard Owen (1804-1892) was a naturalist and distinguished lecturer and
writer on comparative anatomy. Queen Victoria gave him a cottage in Richmond
Park in 1852 in recognition of his work. Owen was especially interested in
extinct animals and was hostile to Darwin. William Henry Flower, "Richard

At least four persons by the name of Holmes resided near Independence in
the 1850's. William S. Holmes purchased ten acres in Willson Addition to town
of Independence from Marcia Davis on February 7, 1856. Mary Apless Holmes
purchased five and one-fourth acres near the town from William A. and Nancy
A. Baldwin on February 22, 1856. Willet Holmes purchased about two hun­
dred acres near the town from Mary R. Butler on February 3, 1852. A deed
dated 1856 is made to Anthony Holmes. See Deed Records of Washington
County, 0, 211-212, 287-288; K, 210; and S, 471. The dates suggest that Miss
Murray probably boarded with Willet Holmes. Willet Holmes was an unsuccess­
ful candidate for sheriff of Washington County in 1856 and represented
Milam County in the Seventh Congress. He, his wife, and a child are buried at
Independence. Biographical Directory of Texan Conventions and Congresses,
1832-1845 (Austin: 1941), 105; and Worth S. Ray, Austin Colony Pioneers,
Including History of Bastrop, Fayette, Grimes, Montgomery, and Washington
Counties (Austin: 1949), 123.

Miss Murray somewhat confused the name of Yegua Creek, sometimes called
Yegua River, a tributary of the Brazos River, which now forms the boundary
between Lee and Burleson and Burleson and Washington Counties.

The petrified forest is at Loebau, a Lee County community on Yegua Creek
a few miles northeast of the present Giddings.

The Indian mounds are also near Loebau.

Miss Murray is correct. The Phlox drummondii is named for Thomas
Drummond, a Scottish botanical collector who made two botanical tours in
North America. On the first, he toured the Hudson River, the Great Lakes area,
and explored as far as the Rocky Mountains. He arrived in Texas in 1831 on the
second tour. There he contracted cholera. He was ill during most of his stay
in Texas but, nevertheless, sent home many plants which were described in
botanical journals published by William Hooker. Drummond had many pointed
remarks to make about Texas, but, according to one report, had made up his
mind to make Texas his permanent residence. He died in Havana on route to
Great Britain in March 1835. Holley, Texas, vii n; Samuel W. Geiser, Naturalists
of the Frontier (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1948). 55-78;
and Susan Delano McKelvey, Botanical Exploration of the Trans-Mississippi
West, 1790-1850 (Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts: Arnold Arboretum of Harvard
University, 1955), 486-570.

Phlox drummondii is an annual, about six to fifteen inches tall, with color
ranging from bright rose-red to Carmine or purple. It grows wild in sandy post
oak woods in a crescent-shaped area from Goliad County north to Brazos
County and west to Wilson County. It blooms from April to June and usually

"William Preston Johnston, later president of Tulane University, followed the same route in the same year. He called Huntsville "the most thriving and cleanest town I have been in in Texas," and commented on the brick penitentiary and large brick college there. Johnston to Rosa Johnston, February 11, 1855, Mrs. Mason Barret Papers (Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans).

"Miss Murray stopped briefly at Fanthorp Inn at Anderson en route to Huntsville. Henry Fanthrop, the proprietor, was born in Lincolnshire, England. According to Fanthrop family legend, he and Miss Murray talked about affairs in England far into the night and his daughter Mary helped Miss Murray gather flowers to press as souvenirs of Texas. Allen, Saga of Anderson, 77; and E. L. Blair, The Early History of Grimes County (1930), 122-123.

"When Miss Murray saw Houston in Washington, D.C., she described him as massive-looking and soldier-like. Olmsted found Houston and his eccentricities to be an interesting topic of conversation in Texas. According to Olmsted's information, Houston had many warm old friends and made himself popular with new acquaintances, but the "greater part of the old fighting Texans hated and despised him." Miss Murray's fellow countryman, Arthur J. L. Fremantle, who saw Houston in Texas in 1863, described him as a "handsome old man, much given to chewing tobacco, and blowing his nose with his fingers." Olmsted, Journey Through Texas, 104; and Lord (ed.), Fremantle Diary, 54.

"Miss Murray's black snake is mythical. A. C. Stimson, Houston herpetologist, suggests that the story Miss Murray heard was a variation of the hoop snake myth which is still current in the part of Texas she visited. According to the myth, the hoop snake makes itself into a hoop to follow and attack people, especially naughty children. No such snake has ever existed in Texas.

"Miss Murray's route joined the Old Spanish Road near Crockett. From there to Natchitoches she followed the route by which Olmsted entered Texas. For this view of Crockett see Olmsted, Journey Through Texas, 83-84.


"The Rapides, a four hundred fourteen ton steamboat, was built in 1855 at New Albany, Indiana. J. C. Dowty was its master. The Rapides was serving the New Orleans-Donaldsonville trade in 1856 and was the New Orleans-Shreveport packet in 1857-1858. N. Philip Norman, "The Red River of the South," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXV (October 1942), 397-535.

"The road could hardly be called a road," said Olmsted of roads along the Louisiana border. "It was only a way where people had passed along before." Olmsted, Journey Through Texas, 55. The date suggests that Miss Murray wrote this entry in New Orleans or on ship above New Orleans.
This statement is contrary to all Southern tradition.

Miss Murray crossed the Angelina River, Attoyac Bayou, and the Sabine River. Olmsted found that the Angelina ferry was reached by a rude causeway, "with bridges at intervals, some two or three miles in length." Miss Murray undoubtedly crossed the Sabine at Gaines Ferry, the same place Olmsted crossed it. *Ibid.*, 81, 64-65.

Miss Murray was a kindred spirit of John W. Thomason who wrote in *Jeb Stuart* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), x, that "if I were not a Texan, I would like to be a Virginian."

Castanea pumila, commonly known as Allegheny chinquapin, is a thicket-forming tree which grows in east Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and along the Atlantic coast as far north as New Jersey. Vines, *Trees*, 200-201.


Miss Murray probably refers to *Herbertia caerulea*, commonly called herbertia, a member of the iris family which has a brief blooming season at about the time of her visit. Herbertia is from six to eight inches tall and is usually found in wet prairies on the coast of Louisiana and Texas. Caroline Dorman, *Wild Flowers of Louisiana* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1934), 30.

African slaves were being smuggled into Texas during the mid-1850's. See Eugene C. Barker, "African Slave Trade in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI (October 1902), 145-168.