

St. Mary'sⁱ Jan. 15th 1868

My dearest Mollie: Your very kind and polite letter of the 6th inst. Is received and I have read it over three times attentively. It is the greatest pleasure I have to read such very kind letters from so good and lovely a wife. I know I ought to be the happiest man in the world and should be if I was at home with my darling Mollie; but being away and likely to be separated for several months, is a great annoyance. I think we shall get loaded this week, and if we can get a crew without detention, shall go to sea about the 23rd inst. I am in very good health and trust that you and our dear children are in enjoyment of the same blessing. You say Annie goes to school, and Georgie has (?) his book, I am much pleased to hear it, for it will keep them both out of mischief. You must try and instill in Annie a desire to learn to read and when she gets so as to be able to read get her interesting children's books and she will learn so rapidly. If you can get Georgie to study his lessons you will achieve quite an undertaking, but he is growing older and larger and buy a little encouragement, will soon take an interest in his book and wish to learn to read. Next spring he will be old enough to go to school and I wish you to send him. Georgie is of a very nervous temperament and requires a good deal encouragement, it will do him more good than harsh treatment, though a little switching will do him good when he is rude and disorderly. Try all you can to keep him and Annie from quarreling (*sic*), point out to them the follie (*sic*) of such conduct. And do not allow Annie to annoy Georgie. I think with gentle treatment and encouragement Georgie will make a very good boy. I am pleased to hear Josey stays with you nights. I think you had better keep him at your house this winter, while he is attending school. He will be good company to you and he will have more time to learn his lessons of morning and evening. There will be another steamer tomorrow when I hope to get another letter from you and several from other parties. The weather is quite warm again and people hereabout are planting their gardens. I wish I could send you some potatoes, though I expect you can buy them cheaper in Milton than here, where we have to pay one dollar per bushel. I do not think sweet potatoes are as dry and sweet here as in Delaware, it may be the fault of the seed. But I never saw in any of the Southern States as good potatoes as we have at home. They grow very large here and I am told yield sometimes 400 bushels per acre, yet here where land can be bought for twenty-five cents per acre and potatoes grown at the rate of from two to four hundred bushels, the people are too indolent to grow enough for their own consumption. I would ask no better business than growing sweet potatoes here at fifty center per bushel. I wish I could send you some nice sweet oranges, I think they grow as large and fine here as any part of the world. I bought three yesterday for twenty five cents (which is a large price in the place where they grow) as large and sweet as I ever saw in Cuba. The orange groves in this section were nearly all destroyed a few years ago by an insect and the people do not have enterprise enough to start new orchards. If some of our northern peach and strawberry growers would come to Florida I think they would find a more profitable field for speculation than in Delaware. Here they could have their orange groves and peach orchard and strawberry patches and fields of sweet potatoes all of which could be produced two months earlier than in Maryland or Del and could be shipped direct to New York market and command big prices for the very reason the rarity. An enterprising and industrious man could soon make a fortune here at truck farming in that way. The riverⁱⁱ here is full of fish and oysters. I can go, at low water, and pick off fine nice flavored oysters right alongside my ship and I have my own in shell about every day which is far better than going to an oyster house and pay ten cents for six stale oysters. I bought some beef this morning at 8 cts pr lb but I was not Boston Market beef. It looked to me as if it had been fattened in poor pasture. I say fattened but I did not see any far. I went last evening with Capt. Wells and others to a Mr. Floyd's living about a mile from St. Mary's, to hear him play the fiddle. He has been a man of good fortune, but

is now very much reduced in circumstances and a little demented or insane. He has not worn shoes for several years, wears his hair and beard long and is shabby in appearance. He is a man of good education and is polite and entertaining to visitors. His only pastime is playing on the violin, guitar and accordion of which he seems to be perfect master. He has a yellow womanⁱⁱⁱ for wife and had a family of children by her, two daughters grown, handsome girls, whom I took to be white when I first saw them. I will visit again soon, Give my best wishes to all, kiss Annie and Georgie for their Pa. I am with heartfelt love your devoted husband Mollie,

Wm. Russel^{iv}

ⁱ This location is today called St. Mary's Shoals, located right on the Georgia – Florida border.

ⁱⁱ The St. Mary's River, which forms the border between Georgia and Florida. Capt. Russell would have had to sail more than 100 miles upriver to reach St. Mary's from the Atlantic, near Amelia Island.

ⁱⁱⁱ Yellow (or "high yaller") is southern vernacular for a light-skinned mixed race (mulatto) person, who would always be considered black.

^{iv} It was very common for the name Russell to be written out as Russel in the mid-19th century.