

Ridgeway, S.C.  
March 1, 1866

Joseph A. Woodward Esq.

My dear Sir

Hattie has this evening received your letter in reply to one written by her some time since, and we are glad to learn that you are all well, and appear to be doing as well as you represent in your letter. We can not say that we are living as well as we did before the war, but we "accept the situation" and are doing the best we can. I have long been anxious to write to you about the condition of your native District and how it was served by Gen. Sherman's army, but really enough could be said to fill a book, and it would be a difficult task to so condense matters as in a letter to afford you any satisfaction, but I can give you a desultory recital of things that happened during the ever memorable month of February 1865. Gen. Sherman with his army left Columbia on the morning of the 26th of February '65, marching northward in three columns, one came up the main Columbia & Wrensboro road called the Gum Spring road, another followed the Charlotte R.R. passing Ridgeway, the third proceeded by the Sandy Level Road which leads to Alston Depot on the Greenville R.R. and crossed Little River at Kincaid's bridge, the three columns forming a junction at Wrensboro. Gen. Kilpatrick disposed his cavalry force on both flanks and swept the district from Broad to Wateree rivers, thus you will perceive our old district was completely devastated from river to river. It is thought that the Broad river country suffered most in the destruction of house property but saved more horse power than we did as they crossed Broad river and carried their stock to Union C.H. The Federal army thought that Gen. Johnston was marching from Augusta, Georgia

by way of Abbaville and did not cross Broad river at all. Among the houses destroyed in the Broad river country are Col. William J. Alstons fine mansion, Governor Means, Mr. Edward Means, Thomas C. Means, and many houses belonging to the Crosby, Edington, McDonald and the Lyles families. Dr. Ephram Lyles lost his fine Strother house with all out-buildings, but saved his mules and horses. Mr. William Lyles saved only her dwelling, but Kilpatrick's men behaved badly here burning every out house, and even burnt her corn crib. On the eastern side of the district the enemy behaved equally as bad. They burnt Col. N.A. Peay's large building and many other smaller buildings, they left only four gin houses in the district and but one grist mill. My father lost two house gins and his steam gin, also his saw mill and every horse and mule, he was trying to move his horses and mules across Wateree river but was captured with his wagons and mules by some cavalry near Peay's Ferry. He was very kindly cared for by General Charlan of Illinois who was in command. He has retired from public life with the downfall of our country and Fairfield is now represented in the Senate by Gen. John Bratton. My father has broken very much in appearance, although not so much in spirits and bears his losses much better than one would have supposed. "We are all up and a-doing;" Have made contracts with the Negroes who at present are deporting themselves courteously towards their former masters and are working very well at present, how long this will continue we do not know, for if the planters here plant as largely to the hand of cotton with free labor as they formerly did when they were slaves the crop will, in my opinion, be lost, for two reasons, the first is the Negro, although interested in the crop as he is to receive one third of it, thinks already that he is

making too much for the white man and receives too little for his labor, and again as our lands have been planted the past three years in corn for the support of the Confederate army, for you remember we were prohibited by legislation from planting but one acre of cotton to the hand. So you perceive our Negroes have been accustomed by three years labor to work but little at cotton and our lands must necessarily be grassy, for corn as a general thing is laid by in July when a large crop of grass grows and leaves its seed for another year. Now let these gentlemen over-crop themselves and should we have a wet June the Negro will stall and nothing will make him work. We dare not use any kind of force for we are immediately arrested and tried of course, and fined perhaps two or three hundred dollars. I regard cotton culture with black free labor in Fairfield District a most fearful agricultural experiment, and shall plant accordingly. I shall select my best land and plant from 2½ to 3 acres to the hand, thus I hope I shall be able to work. I have ten hands, my only trouble is horse power as I have lost every mule and horse by Sherman's army except the one I retreated on. The three I purchased after the army passed are quite indifferent, being good eaters but extremely old and lazy. The Charlotte Railroad is now reconstructed as far as Ridgeway and they expect to reach Columbia by July, but the destruction of the R.R. bridge across the Catawba by a raiding party sent out of North Carolina just a few days before Gen. Lee's surrender has been the cause of serious embarrassment to the company as everything is transported across the river on a very rudely constructed pontoon bridge which causes much delay and now I have heard that there is a freshet in the river which day before yesterday swept the bridge (Pontoon) and also the scaffold recently erected to rebuild the bridge, so here is more trouble and expense.

I don't believe I mentioned that Mr. Osborn Woodward's house near the Anville Rock was burned also with every building in the yard, and all fencing. It presents a gloomy picture to me, but the sight to you of a spot which no doubt is hallowed by many associations of your boyhood could but awaken in you the most painful feelings. I suppose you have been informed of Mr. Boyleston's Major Elliott's and Mr. McMaster's death. If I have written you stale news please excuse it. All of us are well and send love to one and all.

Yours sincerely,

John D. Palmer

P.S. There is a postoffice at Ridgeway--kept by your old friend Dr. Carlisle.

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