Below are transcriptions of the letters that make up the Lafayette McLaws Papers in the Littlejohn Collection at Wofford College. The collection includes 9 letters to Isaac R. Pennypacker, a newspaper editor and writer, dating from 1886 through 1889. Digital images of the letters may be accessed and/or downloaded at Digital Commons @ Wofford College. These transcriptions were completed by Stephanie Walrath (’12), Hannah Jarrett (’12) and Luke Meagher.

L.M.
6 December 2012; 27 June 2014
Dear Sir

I have been delayed by sickness from completing the manuscript as promised, but having it well underway hope to send it during this week.

The map, you sent me, is of no value in the discussion. Genl [sic] Lee had a marked[?] line of defense which that map does not show; upon which the Confederates retired + occupied on the 3d July after Picketts [sic] charge. Nor does the map show the proper position of the forces on either side. It seems to have omitted McLaws Division and some others. I will therefore send you mine, with the understanding that is to be returned to me.

I delivered an address, on the “Battle of Gettysburg” before the Georgia Historical Society, which incidentally discusses the question at issue as to Genl Meades chance of success should he have assaulted Genl [sic] Lee; if you desire to read it and if it pleases to publish it, I will try and lend you a copy, from that in the Society rooms.

Very thoughtfully

your ob servant

L McLaws
Isaac R Pennypacker
Editor Weekly Press
Phil Pa

Dear Sir,

Your letter of 29th inst acknowledging the receipt of manuscript and map (a copy of my address before Ga Historical Society was also enclosed) was received a few moments since.

I thank you for your frank comments on my composition, and agree with you that the paragraph relating to the testimony of Genl Sickles should not be included, and therefore, by that you will erase the whole of it. Commencing “Gen Sickles tasteful” and ending “As he had been but a short time previous assigned to command” - as quoted in your letter - Since forwarding the article, I have regretted that I had written Sickles “opinion” as part of it, and am glad that your discriminating good taste and frankness, has given me the opportunity of correcting my error.

The Confederate Congressman from whom I obtained Ex President Jefferson Davis’ opinions of Gen Meade was [sic] Col R R Bridges, who was at the time and may be now, president - I think - perhaps superintendent of his “Coast Line R. Road,” Wilmington and Weldon N.C.. I can have no objection to your inserting the paragraph as a foot note, as you intimate.

Which writing of Gen. Meade, allow me to suggest, that, it would be a valued contribution to the history of the times, if Gen Meade’s son, would give an “inside” account of Gen Meade “administration” in Georgia especially, so much of it, or relates to the trial of the “Columbus Prisoners,” and the agreement entered into with ex Gov Joseph E Brown, now senator from Georgia, whereby he Gov B. becomes the Prosecuting attorney, receiving therefore, ten thousand dollars, Gov. B. published a pamphlet giving his version of transaction, but not until after the death of Gen M, if Col Meade has never seen a copy of the “pamphlet” alluded to of Gov B, I will if he so desires try and find one for him.

Very respectfully,

L McLaw
Dear Sir

I send you a letter received from Captain F.A. Donaldson 118 P.V. and ask that you publish it, with my reply thereto, if you do not object.

Incidents like these mentioned go strongly to corroborate each narrative; and it is incidentally brought out that Genl. Sickles troops were so badly defeated that their place had to be supplied by men from other commands, and it is done in a way to carry conviction that it was so - thus these digressions from a stridently military record, go not only to prove the record but relieve the dull monotony of a narrative where only the movements of troops are told.

I have written Capt D. that my intentions were to write and ask you to publish his letter, and he will hardly object if my reply to him goes with it -

Very Respectfully

L McLaws
Savannah, Ga Feby 13 1888

Isaac R Pennypacker
Editor Phil. Press
Dear Sir

I sent you a few days since, a review of Genl Long. “Gettysburg”—in his work, called “Memoirs of Gen Lee”—so far on he refers to the operations of McLaws Division—I wrote a letter to accompany the paper, but by mistake it was endorsed[?] with the roll of manuscript - I suppose, as it cannot be found, to make sure that you receive one, I trouble you with this.

I therein stated, or intended to write, that I would at once commence a paper, on the Maryland Campaign of 1862, especially commenting therein on the failure of Franklin to push his advantage, after having forced the Crampton’s Gap, some five or six miles above Harper’s Ferry, and hope to give you a paper that will be acceptable.

Several years ago, five or six or perhaps 8 years ago, Genl Long published an article in some magazine or newspaper stating therein that, when Gen Lee assumed command after the battle of Seven Pines—the day after Genl Johnston was wounded - he, Gen L[ee], found the army very despondent; but that the presence of Genl Lee inferred new life into it. Gen Longstreet sent me clippings from Long’s article and asked if it was true as Long stated, with my command. that he had not discussed it with his - I replied, ridiculing the idea + saying that it was far-fetched; and absurd—that nothing had happened to dampen the ardor of the troops, and [or?] Gen Lee was not known to the army then - and had up to that time, had done nothing to bring him into favorable notice - on the contrary, his campaign in West Va from whatever cause, no one knew, had been a failure - and therefore, if there was a despondent spirit upon us when he came, it must have been, because, Genl Lee was to replace Genl Johnston, whose course both in the Florida war, + afterward in the Mexican War had been brilliant, + whose conduct at Bull Run had excited much enthusiasm -- that Genl Johnston was well known to be a very chivalrous officer, constantly exposing himself, whenever the chance of success seemed doubtful + was personally always scrupulously affable, especially to the men in the ranks and never otherwise than pleasant to any one. Therefore it must have been, that if there was any ob­je­tion[?] it was because, not that Gen Lee Gen Johnston was going away -- I wrote freely to Gen Longstreet who was a classmate-- never supposing for a moment that it would be given to the public. But nevertheless he did publish it without my consent + without my knowledge -- Nor did I know of it until many months after. I happened to read in an old paper a reply to my private letter-- made by Gen Long, who wrote in a very irritated manner- This was so long a time after my letter was written to Gen Longstreet that I did not rejoin and now I suppose Gen Long is still irritated and is taking his spite out. My writing, concerning my command, such stuff as we read of in his Memoir + which i took to liberty to correct + hope you will publish

Gen Franklin in a short letter, in reference to the surrender of Harper’s Ferry, says that his Federal commander surrendered the place at 8 oclock. Or I did not know of a White flag until 10 oclock. How did Franklin know as to the flag before I did? + flag or no flag my forces in line against Franklin did not move from this position until later in the day + he had ample time to have attacked us + the results which will have observed what I will try to show.

[___?] thoughtfully,
L McLaws
Dear Sir,

I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of a number of copies of the Press in which was published the first part of a [sic] part of my article, reviewing so much of Genl Longs memoirs of Gen Lee, as refers to Longstreets corps at Gettysburg. If the remainder of the article has been published, copies of the paper containing it have not been received.

I would now have had the article, promised about Harpers Ferry, +c. ready for you, but happening to come across, a [member?] of the volume “War of the Rebellion?” published by act of Congress containing the reports of the several federal commanders engaged in the Maryland Campaign 1862. I found so much, which to me, was new matter, all substantiating my statements, that I have in a measure, remodeled my article and will rewrite it, quoting largely from Federal sources.

It will have to be borne in mind that, my statements of forces engaged + cover[?] are taken from returns made by the several commanders, to myself, or by me to my superiors and that then returns were never made under the belief that they would be captured. Not if they were wrong in the time they would have been there and then, could not since those returns were surrendered to Gen Lee they have never been seen by those who made them and therefore never could have been doctored to meet the views or prejudices of any body, and therefore must be taken as honest and true.

For instance my returns, rendered at them stated show that I attacked Maryland heights, without artillery and with out our 1600 men, in two Brigades, and that my force at Cramptons Gap was for three hours not over and never reinforced, when too late, by Cobbs Brigade numbering about 1200. The pass should have been taken in one hour and was not, until dark after [four or?] five or six hours fighting.

The flags (white) were not raised in Harpers Ferry until after 10 Am.

My troops did not leave this ground in front of Franklin until late in the evening of the 15th. All this can be proved.

Very respectfully,
Your Obdt. Servant,

L McLaws
Savannah Georgia
April 25, 1888

Isaac R. Pennypacker
Editor Weekly Press
Phil Pa

Dear Sir

Yours of 17 received today together with the papers containing the remaining portions of my article in review of Lacy’s Book, and for which please accept my thanks - If I could obtain copies of those papers, viz. of 15, 22 & 29 I would like to send one to each of my friends, who were prominent in that battle - among them Gen, Longstreet, Gen J.B. Kershaw Camden S.C., Genl E.P. Alexander Sav. Ga. Gen Maxley Sav. - and retain two or three copies for myself & family - Have just received a note from Gen Longstreet ordering four copies - will send him in mind.

The reference to the re-union at Gettysburg, neither Genl Alexander Lovel nor myself have thus far been noticed in connection with it - Genl Sickles on a previous occasion sent me a very pressing invitation promising me good cheer and to give me a tent on the field, next to himself - But now I suppose as he may think I am not a Sickles man - it will not be in order to have me - However although the invitation would be taken as simply complimentary - I could not go, for the reasons given for not accepting your very kind invite for me to go in company with yourself out to tour the field.

Gen E.M. Law was a Brigadier in Hoods Division and was harshly treated by Genl. Longstreet and perhaps is inimical to him today. He has gotten many points from me in reference to my Division and has my Official Report as published in the “War of the Rebellion” which reports is very minute and lengthy - He has also obtained my statement in regard to some matters which are put down in the books, in every official report - How far his views at the causes of failure in that last campaign may agree with mine I, of course, cannot say, as yet. Whether he thinks that it was not intended to be a success or was unsuccessful because success was not possible, I do not know. If I chose to do so, I think I could make others besides myself, think that it was not intended to be a success.

Gen Law wrote an article whether published or remains to be, I do not know - concerning matters that happened after the battle of Chickamauga, he sent it to me for perusal. - I found that he had made statements of affairs, for instance - asserting that the enemy was not pursued after the battle! not knowing that I was ordered in pursuit & went at once - following the enemy to the outskirts of the city (causing them to burn all the houses in front of the fortifications) and holding my ground, until Head Quarters at Watkins Hill overlooking the towns twenty four hours in advance of the rest of the Army - I have no idea what credit was given me for it, simply perhaps, because I never claimed any - I have told him that a pursuit was ordered by Gen Bragg and I was to follow other Divisions - but as the others did not come, I advanced, expecting the others to follow but was mistaken - Gen Cheatham was ordered to report to me, but although he came into the valley, he withdrew his troops because of the large bodies of the enemy he encountered - leaving me on Watkins Hill - he reported in person, after dark, & I told him to stay on the right , 3 miles away. I made no official report of this although my troops were quite hotly engaged, while
in the pursuit & my loss was considerable. It has been fashionable to abuse General Bragg attributing every thing that happened wrong, to his unfitness for command, that I would be very glad indeed if you would add your influence to cause a call to be made for Genl Braggs papers so that he may be heard in his own defense - I understand that he left a very full record, and as he was a very ready and very forceful writer, equal to any other in the U.S.A. and occupied the highest positions his narrative of events would be in the highest degree interesting - if his papers could be obtained I know that it would be showing that pursuit was ordered - that my command alone went forward and those who were ordered and did not go will be named! I can only recollect now that Genl Breckinridge was ordered with his Divisions to lead, but he did not come - Why not I never inquired - He may have gone another road.

Senator Pugh of Alabama once told me that Mrs Bragg had offered to give him contents of the papers of her husband - She may be holding them for publication on her own account. If so they should be purchased for the War Record of Rebellion!!

Would be glad should you think my last contribution a worthy one

Very truly
L McLaws

I have just returned from a long trip into the interior of State, and will leave again in the morning - thus have hastened to reply

Very truly
L McLaws
What is the matter with the document I sent, relating to the Maryland Campaign of 1862? I have nothing from you relative to it, not even, that it has been rec.

I took it for granted that “Politic,” or the war now being carried on, between the parties representing “Protection for protection’s sake!” and “Protection incidental on[?] revenue,” requires so much attention that the past war is a very small matter in comparison.

But the Campaign now on font[?] is as much of a war as was the one called “The War of the Rebellion.” We have armies enlisted on each side, which go as ordered by their respective leaders, with any little idea of the merits or demerits[?] of the questions really at issue, as did any armies in the field. You practice all the arts of strategy, make false attacks to conceal the real one, have the same troubles regular armies have in getting supplies of ammunition and provisions and arms, and in all things, you act as if it was real war, excepting that you do not kill with the sword, or with the gunpowder, or the bayonet - but his devastation is nevertheless just as great, and the Conqueror cares as little for the suffering he caused, as did the victorious General.

In my paper I aimed to prove by quotations from documents officially published that after due consideration by Gen Halleck, commander in chief, of the question. “Shall all the troops now in Harper’s Ferry be ordered to the Maryland Heights.” This on 5th Sep, 1882. He submitted it for the action of Gen Wool who commanded the Department in which Harper’s Ferry was included, and Gen Wool ordered Col Miles to hold Harper’s Ferry to the last extremity. by this order, he deprived Col Miles of all discretion in the matter; he was to defend Harper’s Ferry, and every other position was subordinate to it. By occupying the Heights he most certainly could not have prevented Genl Jackson from occupying the town. For illustration, read what was done at Fredericksburg when Burnside occupied the Heights on the opposite side of the Rappahannock, with a much more numerous Arty[artillery?], and under much more favorable circumstances. The Arty[sic] then had no effect against the occupation of the town. Not one foot being abandoned because of the Arty[artillery?] fire.

I also aimed to show that in obedience to his orders, Col Miles did hold the town and all may say “to the last extremity,” because[?] the universal testimony was in his official publications “that the troops could not have withstood an assault!. at any rate he held it long enough, to have enabled Gen McLellan and Gen Franklin to have moved their troops, so as to have enabled Miles to have attacked Gen Lees scattered forces, in detail each by largely[?] superior forces[?] of arms[?].

That the opportunity to do this was given, and was not taken advantage of, but was lost by inaction!

I also showed, or attempted it, that at Sharpsburg, every portion of the Confederate force was engaged - their tremendous losses, in each and every command, and compound it with the numbers they had in the battle, show that there was no man in reserve, whereas the reviews[?] I quote show that in the reserve [under Genl Lee?] said to be 15000 strong + Franklin’s corp the
losses were so small, that we are authorized in saying that [they?] were not heavily engaged+ might be looked on as reserve forces. And this reserve [numbered?] was more than the Confederates had in line[?] at any one time. For scattered bodies arriving one after another, to at once be ordered into the fight.

So that it seems as if the inaction still continued and every opportunity which would bear taken advantage of was lost.

It requires free quotations from official reports to make this credible. And it also requires very full extracts to make it credible, that Col Miles did not have a war with him, who prevailed against the surrender of Harper’s Ferry, and urged that his troops start an assault.

For the above reason, and because I know his public opinion is not in accord with the views I have taken, I thought it best to make large quotations from official publications, so that the public, or the large majority, of them who read, who cannot get this information for themselves, may form their own opinions, from official data given them,

But if you think that mere reference is sufficient to change public opinion, as I think it must be changed, if we really are making the point, I am willing to rewrite my article and endeavor to conform to your needs.

Very respectfully
Your obtsv
L McLaws
Dear Sir

I herewith send you a photo of myself taken some eight or ten years past. This in compliance with your request in your letter of the 25th rec (recent?) February. It has become indistinct by age and the effects of the climate. But if it will answer your purpose, I will be gratified and feel complimented by the desire expressed for it.

As for Gen Longstreet! His corps was composed of three divisions commanded respectively by McLaws, Hood, and Pickett, and his Arty by Gen E P Alexander. He knew that his division commander, in his dep. (dept?) of Arty, required any instructions that he could give, and therefore never gave any, beyond the order of march and conferring with his division commander, who in turn never taught him, except to get in the news-- “Never for advice, for they were fully his equal in ability, nor did he seek council [in?] conferences with his equals in rank, nor even with his superiors, but allowed himself to be influenced by very inferior personages either of his staff, or from those of his command, not his division commanders, who were seeking adornment by flattering his self conceit, already offensive in its exhibits, or by innuendos or lies intended to depreciate, some one or two of his Division Commanders, who seldom went to Corps Hd Qrs when neither amusement nor information was obtainable.

He was placed prominently forward, in the first instance, because he was connected by marriage with his [F.F. Co?] his wife being a Miss Garland of Virginia, and him by [self?] assertive conceit. And persistent pushing himself at Head Quarters, regardless of the claims or merits of any others, in fact was depreciating those of all others, regardless of even the truth if it was in his way. He gained his first position. He is a brave man, and this with his obstinacy and [self assertion?] placed him far beyond his merits, such at least as history will award him. He was incapable of conducting a campaign from the evolutions of his own brain and his jealousy of advice was so great that really at times it seemed as if he preferred that of the enemy rather than to take it from one of his subordinates and had taken it from the opposing commander. A notable instance of this characteristic is the conduct of the Campaign against Knoxville, which he commanded, for he could not have ordered movements more to the advantage of the opposing forces, if he had acted only in conformity of the orders of Burnside and Gen Grant. The expedition was such a remarkable failure, when it should have been a success. That there who knew of events as they happened have attributed the faults committed to a desire of Longstreet, not to succeed! But I think they are attributed rather to his badly balanced [sic] nature which unfitted him for separate command.

I beg leave to express my sympathy for yourself and family in affliction.

very trult yours

L McLaws

Gen Longstreet’s mother was a ___ of the same blood of the wife of Gen Grant, hence the cause of the suspicion with which some persons have regulated the "curious" conduct of Gen Longstreet when he happened to be opposed to Gen Grant in Chattanooga and Tenn + c.
Sav GA Aug 30 1889  
Isaac R Pennypacker  
Phil Press  
Dear Sir

Your kind note of the 10th duly received after my return from a short trip.  
I have been for the first time in my life, half-sun st[?]|uck and have been disinclined to write or do anything else, until the cool [ warm?], came to us yesterday.  
The heat has been more continuous than ever before in my experience and the day weather, all together has made the climate [precariously?] exhaustive.

I hope soon to comply with your kind call for more matter from Me, and am much obliged to you for making it.

I delivered a lecture before the GA Historical society in June ... subject the Battle of Fredericksburg 1862 which will be published in the Century some time in the future-- I am assured--or rather so much of it as related directly to the battle. So I am led to believe!

According to my understanding of that battle, if Franklin had pushed his forced with vigor and enthusiasm, bringing all his troops into the fight--as the Confederates always did-- I believe that Gen. Lee would probably have retired toward Richmond. And it only confirms my belief that if Franklin had pushed his advantages gained, when he found Crampton’s Gap in Maryland in my rear-- Gen. Lee would have had to retreat across the Potomac, or have met great disaster about Gettysburg.

I used to know Franklin well, was at West Point with him, some classes ahead, and already did advise him as a gentleman great ability and of high character. But he was not of that class of commander, who could risk very much, even to obtain the greatest results, should he succeed: He saw too many dangers, and shrunk from a number of them, which existed in his imagination only or were so remote and depended on his adversary having information that it was nearly impossible for him to have, as to justify this. Having called imaginary , and therefore I think he should be held responsible in the greatest measure for the failure of McClellan to Gen over Lees army in Maryland. and for the disaster which followed the assault on Marye’s Heights at Fredericksburg.

I would like to send you an article which would go to sustain the assertion that if Franklin had been energetic in pursuing the advantages gained in [forcing?] Crampton’s Gap in rear of McLaws in Maryland. The Battle of Sharpsburg would not have been fought. But Gen Lee would have been retired across the Potomac and incidentally I will bring in the conduct of Franklin’s Command at Fredericksburg, to show that he was of the class of Commander who were too jealous of their reputations even to risk disaster, and therefore was as unsafe to rely on in a great enterprise, as it would be upon one day later Gen Sickles, who would done [sic] anything to bring fame to Sickles. Merit was his first consideration.

Very respectfully  
Your obedient servant  
L McLaws