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**“The place to forget the outside world, and live in one’s self”:
Harriet Beecher Stowe and
Intensive Reading in Florida**

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Written as a series of letters combining elements of travel and nature narratives, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Palmetto Leaves* (1873) functioned for its readers as a prescriptive guide to traveling and wintering in Florida. The opening pages of the Osgood publication of *Palmetto Leaves* feature two contrasting images of Florida. The first image, the book’s frontispiece, portrays an impermeable forest of palms festooned with moss that foreshadows the gothic Florida of venomous snakes and hungry alligators that Stowe describes in the text. The next image, a map fronting the book’s opening chapter, illustrates the area around Florida’s St. Johns River. The map highlights the numerous towns situated along the

area’s waterways and provides a striking counterpoint to the image of the swamp presented by the book’s frontispiece. In an important detail, a prominent X-like figure of railroads connects the upper coasts of the Florida peninsula with cities like Jacksonville and Tallahassee. The frontispiece and the map thus emphasize the tension between economic and technological development and the untamed, inhospitable nature of much of Florida’s interior. Their juxtaposition illustrates Florida’s extremes of developed and undeveloped land, and it represents the tensions of frontier life explored in the book. This essay will explore the significance of the way that Stowe’s depiction of Florida’s towns and rivers in *Palmetto Leaves* anticipates the state’s eventual economic development, but ultimately depicts it as a place separate from the postbellum United States.

Outside of the contexts of literary tourism and ecocriticism, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Palmetto Leaves*, along with her collected

correspondence from Florida, have not been examined for what they reveal about Stowe's experience of reading, the mail, and print circulation while in Florida. I contend that these Florida writings reveal an understanding and experience of a location separate from the urban North through her depiction of the reception and reading of texts arriving in Florida. In this article, I highlight Stowe's experiences of reading in Florida, linking those experiences together with her understanding of the fundamental differences in the ways texts circulated there and in the North. I argue that Stowe's Florida writings depict a mode of reading that united Stowe and her companions and served as a model of reading for her Northern audience. Stowe found herself drawn to Florida for many reasons, and prominent among them was finding a respite from the profession of authorship and the circulation of print. Stowe's description of her life in Florida demonstrates to her Northern readers an ideal way of engaging texts that binds people together through intensive reading. *Palmetto Leaves* serves as an opportunity for Stowe to document her appreciation of texts in

a world experiencing significant technological advances that promoted solitary and distracted reading. In Stowe's writing, Florida exists in a steam-driven era of circulation while simultaneously harkening back to the model of circulation that she preferred most where texts were scarce, precious, and important to people at a much more personal level. Her attention to the circulation of texts—books, periodicals, and letters—represents the most important aspect of how she articulates Florida's separation from the North. That description of the reception of the mail and other texts highlights the ability of reading material to foster personal connections and to show to readers the benefits of Florida's isolation from the North.¹

In Florida, Stowe was better able to appreciate the texts that arrived at her Florida homestead through the mail. Florida provided Stowe with the circumstances to escape the urban North while also allowing her time to rejuvenate creatively and step back from the profession of authorship. Both Stowe's public and private writings from Florida document the multifaceted influence that the place

had on her connection to the North and how she described her experience of incoming texts. It is Stowe's depiction of the experience of receiving and interacting with texts and their effects on her that most dynamically illustrates Florida as a location that alters the way Stowe read and appreciated texts. The letters and other texts received by Stowe and her family represent a communal experience that draws people together, and Stowe and her family enjoy the letters received from readers throughout *Palmetto Leaves*. By describing the reception and reading of texts in Florida, Stowe invites readers to participate in the experience by conveying that correspondence and other texts are precious reading material. Florida promotes a change in perspective by dramatically altering how Stowe and her companions appreciate their interactions with books and periodicals through a process that emphasizes the rewards of intensive reading and the power of texts to bind people together. Stowe models a way of reading that relies on dedicated and intensive engagement with writing and print.

Serial installments of *Palmetto Leaves* first appeared in *The Christian Union*, the evangelical newspaper edited by Stowe's brother, Henry Ward Beecher. *Palmetto Leaves* provided nineteenth-century northern readers one of the most substantial introductions to Florida available. When *Palmetto Leaves* first appeared in *The Christian Union*, Stowe was well acquainted with Florida. It had long afforded her opportunities for pursuing economic investments, escaping harsh Northern winters, and providing a space for alleviating her mental and physical exhaustion. She first traveled to Florida in 1867, having the year prior established a presence in the state when she tasked her troubled son, Frederick, with the responsibility of running a farm there. Stowe hoped Florida would help Frederick to overcome personal demons brought on by a head injury at the Battle of Gettysburg.² While she might be viewed as a carpetbagger, the truth is that by the time Stowe began traveling to Florida she was already well accustomed to the difficulties of frontier living from her time in rural Connecticut, frontier Cincinnati, and far-off Maine.³ These earlier frontier

experiences provided her with both insider and outsider perspectives, making her different from many of her Northern peers. Her investment in Florida comes across both in *Palmetto Leaves* and in her letters where she details her travels to the interior, her agricultural interests, and her work to improve the lives of recently emancipated African Americans. Having lived in various frontier settings, Stowe was able to speak authoritatively on Florida, and she does not naïvely recount her experience of it from the perspective of someone thrown into a frontier setting for the first time. Stowe also chose to forgo resort life in favor of maintaining a homestead, which afforded her even more ability to speak about aspects of life in Florida that resonated with individuals in the North looking to visit or establish themselves as full-time residents of Florida.

Aside from Florida's potential personal and business investment opportunities, the state provided Stowe with opportunities to disengage from the stress of an active writing life. According to Stowe's friend, biographer, and early compiler of her

letters, Annie Fields, Florida allowed Stowe to escape from personal concerns while offering opportunities for her to reinvigorate her creativity.⁴ According to Fields, Stowe's time in the North was spent writing and shepherding the texts that she produced through various aspects of the production and circulation. Fields observed that Stowe's "own times for going and coming were somewhat uncertain, depending upon her work, upon printers, binders, and publishers" and "upon the weather and the state of her own health" (Fields 1898, 305). In the North, Stowe found herself burdened by participating in the profession of authorship and as the subject of newspapers fixated on the legal and personal troubles of her brother, Henry Ward Beecher.⁵ During this period of personal stress, Fields notes that Stowe's "strength, continually tried to the full by the daily work at her desk, visibly failed" (Fields 1898, 354). Fields' observation reveals that Stowe's waning ability to write resulted from the circumstances of Henry's legal troubles and Stowe's need to fulfill professional obligations. According to Fields, Stowe "sought

refuge as much as possible in Florida, where, remote from newspapers and the battle of the world, her exhausted forces found space to recuperate” (Fields 1898, 354). In other words, Florida provided Stowe a respite from the attention showered on the Beechers by Northern newspapers.

Even while Stowe’s Florida in *Palmetto Leaves* and her letters maintains a tenuous connection to the North, it remains just connected enough to the print centers of the urban North to ensure an inward flow of letters and other texts. Florida’s distance from the North coupled with the underdeveloped interior infrastructure in Florida functions as a bulwark against the technologically fueled circulation driving the production and distribution of print that was present in the urban centers of the United States. As a result of Florida’s geographic separation from the North, Stowe waited eagerly for the mail and then savored each piece that arrived. As such, her ability to escape the stress of her personal and professional life in the North came partly from Florida’s position on the fringes of the postbellum United States. Stowe directly experienced—

and benefited from—the way that Florida’s geographic distance from the North’s developed, modernized infrastructure created circumstances affected the frequency with which texts circulated within Florida’s boundaries.

While technological changes benefitted much of the United States, Florida retained many characteristics typically ascribed to a frontier region. Though Florida was one of the earliest sites of settlement in North America, for Stowe’s readers, her descriptions of postbellum Florida largely fit that of a frontier. Though Stowe promotes the benefits of Florida to her readers, she does not hide the fact that what she encounters in Florida is different than what visiting or migrating Northerners might expect to encounter. It is difficult to imagine nearly a hundred years after the founding of the United States that Florida existed as such a rugged and underdeveloped location in contrast to so much of the east coast. Steven Noll observes that “Antebellum Florida, as both territory and state, was ‘frontier’ country, more so than even the western territories that we usually associate with the term” (Noll 2004,

9).⁶ The difficulties of penetrating into the jungle-like interior of the state contributed to Florida's slow development compared to the colonial experiences of the rest of the United States. Stowe's commentary about the barren nature of post-Civil War Florida is not surprising, given that much of the state's interior lacked the kind of infrastructure—namely railroads and navigable waterways—that facilitated the distribution of people and goods, especially print, until well into the early part of the twentieth century. After all, it was just two years prior to Stowe's arrival when the Confederate government, in its death throes, allocated funds to make improvements to some of Florida's interior waterways (Noll 2004, 11-12).

The Florida depicted by Stowe in her writings must have seemed like a frontier in many ways to Stowe's contemporaries. The modern steam technology propelling travel to Florida masks the state's frontier qualities, a point Stowe reiterates throughout *Palmetto Leaves* as she warns potential visitors about Florida's realities. Stowe girds her readers for the experience of Florida, telling them

that "the *nakedness* of the land is an expression that often comes over one" and they must "prepare [themselves] to see a great deal that looks rough and desolate and coarse" (Stowe 1873, 33, 36). Stowe's blunt warning to readers is a dire one as she specifically points to Florida's "rough and desolate and coarse" character. Her phrasing and shift in her sentence construction in this particular instance marks a noticeable change in her syntax. Her warning is incantatory and reinforces Florida's realities to her readers and is crafted to speak directly to Northern tourists expecting a resort experience or a continuation of enjoying the amenities they encountered in New York or Savannah as they traveled south. Florida's sparseness emerges in Stowe's depiction in which she writes that "the few houses to be seen along the railroad are the forlornest of huts," which emphasizes the contrast between the technological development embodied by the railroad and the scarcity of settlement (Stowe, *Palmetto Leaves* 28). Stowe describes St. Augustine, one of Florida's oldest established settlements, as "stand[ing], alone, isolated, connected

by no good roads or navigation with the busy, living, world" (Stowe 1873, 213-214). Like Stowe's description of Florida as "rough and desolate and coarse," her description of St. Augustine also emphasizes remoteness, painting a bleak image of the town as separated and lifeless.

Stowe's decision about where to live in Florida, especially to live outside the influence of Florida's resort communities, offered a further rejuvenating isolation that heightened the state's inherent separation from the North. Even while much of Stowe's Florida writings celebrate escaping the pressures of Northern life, she also documents the incursion of modern attitudes present in the resorts of Florida. The resort life depicted in *Palmetto Leaves* serves as a counterpoint to the more isolated experience of Stowe at her homestead and her frequent nature excursions. The resorts of northeast Florida represent the most Northern-like locations Stowe visited there. The resort community of Green Cove, for instance, catered to Northerners seeking a resort experience while also appealing to invalids who hoped that Florida's pleasant climate would

reinvigorate their health. Leisure activities in Green Cove included playing games like croquet and strolling along the resort's grounds, and it attracted Northerners who expected an experience similar to resorts in well-established communities. For the many tourists and infirm who traveled to Florida, their experience of the state started and ended at many of the resorts established there. In her description of Green Cove, Stowe describes the "fair ones," in effect, those "that have been accustomed to the periodical excitement of a shopping-tour" who "would sink into atrophy without an opportunity to spend something" (Stowe 1873, 92-93). One reason that Green Cove might be more like the urban North than other locations in Florida is that it is much more connected to the world beyond Florida. Stowe notes that "the mail comes every day to Green Cove, and is sent for, from the Magnolia House, in a daily morning carriage" (Stowe 1873, 92). The daily arrival of the mail in Green Cove is an event for guests of the Magnolia House resort, not because of what it brings, but because of its opportunity to provide for an

excursion. Stowe observes that “it is one of the amusements of the guests to ride over, on these occasions, for a little morning gossip and shopping, as Magnolia, being quite sequestered, does not present the opportunity to chaffer even for a stick of candy” (Stowe 1873, 92). In Green Cove, mail isn’t about fostering positive interpersonal connections amongst the guests; instead, mail delivery is an opportunity to participate in gossip and the consumption of material goods.

Stowe’s depiction of Florida’s resorts reveals elements of Northern life to be found in Florida. In the resorts, Stowe could have found a more Northern life, if she wanted it, but it is significant that Stowe chose to live further afield from the more developed portions of Florida. By removing herself from the North and escaping the influences of Florida’s resorts, Stowe could better appreciate the rejuvenating isolation of Florida. In one letter, Stowe describes the location of her homestead as “a wild uncultured country forest all around the sea on one side & the broad St Johns five miles wide on the other” (quoted in Hedrick 1994, 330).

Looking outwards towards the distant readers of the North served by *The Christian Union*, Stowe observes their “world” is “seen in perspective, far off and hazy” (Stowe 1873, 66). She individualizes the readership of *The Christian Union*, referring to them as “Mr. Union,” and notes that their world is like “the opposite shores of the river” (Stowe 1873, 66). Stowe’s metaphorical description of separation acknowledges her physical and psychological distance from the North through invoking the idea of a river separating her from the outside world. Stowe makes similar observations in a letter to George Eliot in which she reinforces her sentiments about the outside world, telling Eliot that Florida “is the place to forget the outside world, and live in one’s self” (Fields 1898, 339). While she does not specifically reference the North here, in another letter she does directly implicate life in the North as the source of her feelings of being overwhelmed. Bound by forests and water, the Florida homestead is sequestered by a physical barrier to the world beyond. The physical space of Florida answers Stowe’s longing for a separation from the outside world.

The forests, ocean, and river surrounding Stowe's homestead shape her conception of the physical and psychological distance from the North, and these same environmental features provide, through her metaphor, a mode of articulating her separation from the North. Critical of the "far off and hazy" world of her northern readers in *Palmetto Leaves*, Stowe is more pointed in her criticisms of the North in writing to Eliot, highlighting the transcendent mindset she enters when in Florida. For example, she writes that she "enter[s] another life" and in language echoing her sentiments from *Palmetto Leaves* informs Eliot that the "the world recedes—I am out if it" (Fields 1898, 336). In Stowe's Florida the outside world "ceases to influence" and "its bustle and noise die away in the far distance." She even proclaims that "I sit and dream and am happy, and never want to go back North, nor do anything with the toiling, snarling world again" (Fields 1898, 387). Stowe attributes the ability to enter this calmer mindset to Florida's "quaint, rude, wild wilderness sort of life, both rude and rich." Her description of the "rude and rich"

echoes the description of the "forlornest of huts" mentioned in her early description of Florida for readers of *Palmetto Leaves*. These descriptions of Florida link together her understanding of the frontier as a beneficial personal experience that fosters her disengagement from the North. For Stowe personally, the conditions in Florida are not limiting or burdensome; they offer opportunities to experience life in a meaningful way, especially through reading of print and letters. Stowe's observations about Florida serve as warnings to readers expecting the comforts and amenities of the North. However, the characteristics of Florida that Stowe warns readers to prepare for are the very ones that she herself embraces as opportunities to experience life in a deeply rewarding manner that fosters personal connections—and heightens the ability to intensively read circulating texts.

Compared against other locations, Florida lagged behind significantly in terms of the production of books and periodicals, which promoted a reliance on texts arriving from outside of the state and allowed Stowe to disconnect from the abundance of print prevalent

in the urban North. For example, drawing on data representing the national distribution of the American News Company's *American Bookseller's Guide*, a catalogue received by each "bookseller, newsdealer, music-dealer, and stationer in the United States," Michael Winship compiles a compelling map of the situation of distribution of print across the United States in 1870 (quoted in Winship 2007, 124). Winship notes that "this map suggests the extent of the national retail distribution network for printed materials in 1870" (Winship 2007, 124). According to the record of the American News Company, agents in the state of Florida received 26 copies of their *American Bookseller's Guide*. The numbers for Florida lag significantly behind states like Pennsylvania (1,055), New York (1,893), and Massachusetts (887). Additionally, during the 1860s when Stowe began travelling to Florida, the state had a total of 22 newspapers and periodicals active in the state. During the 1870s when Stowe began writing *Palmetto Leaves*, the total number of newspapers and periodicals increased to 23, while other states

witnessed dramatic increases in the availability of in-state periodicals (Groves 2007, 225-226). The print production of the North far outpaced Florida's production of print, and the state also lagged behind the explosion of postbellum print production found in the territories of the expanding American west. The results for Florida's production of newspapers and periodicals is more in keeping with western states like Oregon (24), Utah (18), and Colorado (15) (Winship 2007, 126). Compared to the seats of Northeastern publishing power in states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, which numbered in the hundreds, and the emerging production of print in the newly settled western territories, Florida's low production of newspapers and periodicals is notable because paradoxically it serves as one of Florida's important benefits to Stowe.

While it may appear counterintuitive that Stowe steps away from established urban centers in order to make stronger personal connections, it reveals her complex feelings about the power of an inundation of print to minimize personal connections. Florida's lack of

a native print culture meant Stowe and her family relied heavily on the importance of the mail. The reception of the mail at Stowe's homestead functioned as an ordered affair and highlighted the importance of circulation to the daily life and personal interactions of those involved. In one letter Stowe directly addresses readers accustomed to receiving their mail in "dribble[s] two or three times a day" (Stowe 1873, 64). Stowe tells these readers that they "cannot conceive the interest that gathers around these two weekly arrivals" of mail in Florida (Stowe 1873, 64). She refers to mail days as "one of the two red-letter days of our week," an allusion to the old English practice of denoting saints days and religious holidays in almanacs and calendars by the use of red print, a practice also employed in colonial America (Stowe 1873, 64). What follows in Stowe's description is a sanctified and regimented order of service for the distribution of letters. The arriving mail revolves around an experience in which "the whole forenoon is taken up with it" as Stowe and her companions watch from their veranda the progress of the "the mail-

boat far down the river" (Stowe 1873, 64). As it "sail[s] up like a great white stately swan," a tension exists until the boat arrives with its treasure of letters and print. Stowe recounts that the mail boat was "freighted with all our hopes and fears" as it navigated the waters surrounding her community. The anxiety of waiting for the mail is relieved by a pleasant anticipation, casting the moment of its arrival as a voluntary and participatory event. Waiting and expectation intensify the materiality of letters, heightening the repeated enjoyment of sharing the mail with household members. The personal interactions fostered by the mail are an example of what Mary Louise Kete calls "sentimental collaborations," the shared experiences of feeling that bring and bind people together (Kete 1999). The combination of the mail's rarity with the personal connections it fosters helps to heighten the mail's importance to Stowe and her companions.

After the boat to docked, the newly arrived mail was eagerly distributed: there comes "the rush for our mail; then the distribution: after which all depart to their several apartments

with their letters," Stowe writes (Stowe 1873, 64). Initially a private experience of reading, the letters become part of a communal experience as there "follow readings to each other, general tidings and greetings; and when the letters are all read twice over, and thoroughly discussed, come the papers" (Stowe 1873, 65). The importance of the letters can be gauged by the fact that they are relished in solitude by each participant in Stowe's home and then are shared. The acts of reading and sharing the letters are important because they bind people together as they discuss the letters "thoroughly." Stowe's description of communal reading in Florida is significant because as Ronald J. Zboray observes, the nineteenth century's rise of solitary reading stemmed from extended periods on boats and rail lines providing new locations for the reading of cheaply produced newspapers, magazines, and books.⁷ Additionally, it is noteworthy that it is the personal correspondence that is read first, as the personal relationships such correspondence promotes holds primacy over the other print materials, such as

periodicals, that arrived with the letters in the mail. The practice of reception and reading in the homestead represents part of the well-established parlor culture in which Stowe participated throughout her life and which was important to her as both personally and professionally. That letters in *Palmetto Leaves* are bound up in the experience of waiting, distribution, reading, sharing and discussing emphasizes the letter's importance to Stowe and her family.

The emphasis on letters is especially telling since much of the mail received by Stowe is fan mail from curious readers, and yet the letters remain important to Stowe and her family. Letters from friends, family, and *Christian Union* readers are frequently referenced in *Palmetto Leaves*. The reading depicted in Stowe's writing demonstrates a model of intensive and careful reading, and her description of it is didactic. Stowe models for readers how texts should be enjoyed through private intensive reading and later as part of a communal reading experience in the company of others. When she writes in the opening chapters of *Palmetto*

Leaves that “we begin to find our usual number of letters” Stowe reveals her established connections with friends, family, and fans outside of the state (Stowe 1873, 24-25). She notes that “We get every year quantities of letters from persons of small fortunes” (Stowe 1873, 37). Stowe often laments her inability to provide individual responses. However, Stowe extends a great effort expressing gratitude for the letters she receives and inviting readers into Stowe’s family. In describing the anticipation for the mail, Stowe casts a scene in which her readers, the ones that send her mail, can imagine Stowe’s family waiting for the mail to wend its way through the watery passages to Stowe’s homestead.⁸ Thus, Stowe’s focus on mail delivery in *Palmetto Leaves* makes readers a part of the experience of the mail’s arrival.

Unhurried by needing to consume an unending stream of print, Stowe proclaims to readers of *Palmetto Leaves* that Florida “is the place to read papers and books” (Stowe 1873, 66). Though a number of periodicals arrived at Stowe’s Florida home, the quantity is trumped by the sense of isolation, which allows her deeply

sustained contemplation of the written and printed word. Her emphasis on reading, italicized in the original text, reveals that Florida life promotes a different form of reading and not the hurried consumption of texts found elsewhere. In Florida, Stowe observes that “every thing that sweeps into this quiet bay is long and quietly considered” (Stowe 1873, 66). Her description of the consumption of letters, newspapers, and magazines shares more in common with the depictions of circulating texts in her antebellum New England fiction where the denizens of her often rural settings relied upon the scant dissemination of print from major American cities or supplies of transatlantic reading materials. Stowe’s limited access to print heightens the importance of texts arriving in Florida, placing it in opposition to the experiences of Northern city dwellers accessing print several times a day.

In another letter to an unnamed recipient, Stowe proclaims that Florida “is where we read books,” while “Up North nobody does,— they don’t have time,” but if the person that she is addressing sends her “his book” Stowe

"will 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest'" it (Fields 1898, 386). Stowe's phrase "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest," references Proper 28, a prayer by Thomas Cranmer in *The Book of Common Prayer*. While Proper 28 alludes to the Protestant emphasis on the Word, Stowe invokes the idea as a specific type of exegesis for the interpretation of words from circulating texts. Her linking of reading with the devotion at the heart of Cranmer's prayer demonstrates the importance of reading and the need to devote one's complete attention to reading, while also linking back to Stowe's reference to mail deliveries as one of her "red-letter days."

In another letter in which Stowe describes her reading experiences, she recalls how her husband "set up our tent, he with German, and Greek, and Hebrew, devouring all sorts of black-letter books, and I spinning ideal webs out of its bits that he lets fall here and there" (Fields 1898, 336). Under the tent, Stowe and her husband join together in a moment of bonding facilitated by texts. The "black-letter books" are important, but the ability of print to promote a shared experience is more important.

Emphasizing an attention to texts, Stowe records that her husband "keeps up a German class of three young ladies, with whom he is reading Faust for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time" while "in the evening I read aloud to a small party of the neighbors" (Fields 1898, 387). Florida promotes investing in reading material to the point of repeatedly enjoying a text in the company of others. Intimate gatherings afford opportunities to enjoy print in the company of family and friends. In the company of others a familiar text becomes a new, shared experience. Throughout her career, Stowe makes numerous mentions of the inundation of mass produced print, especially facilitated by technologies of distribution. The deluge of "stories stories stories" Stowe's narrator laments in the preface to *My Wife and I* becomes manageable in Florida. The mail brings the arrival of "about a dozen other papers" with which Stowe's husband "is seen henceforward with bursting pockets, like a very large carnation bursting its calyx"; "he is a walking mass of papers" (Stowe 1873, 65). Unburdened by daily mail delivery, the

fears of print overwhelming readers are absent from Florida as print is manageably and thoughtfully enjoyed in an experience emphasizing the fostering of personal connections through reading.

Because of promotional literature focused on Florida, the circulation of texts Stowe describes in *Palmetto Leaves* was not destined to last. The difficulties Stowe describes that make frontier Florida a location to re-establish the primacy of letters and print are also the ideal conditions that make Florida an enticing location of economic development for settlers and immigrants looking to establish industry and agriculture, and to expand networks of technology. What Stowe documents in *Palmetto Leaves*, just like the world she documented in her historical and regional fiction, will eventually disappear. The emergence of the Florida we know today owes a great deal to the promotional literature written by authors like Stowe. Stowe not only encourages Florida's economic development but also participates in it, describing her own agricultural and economic interests while also providing the

inspiration for people to settle in Florida.

¹ Benedict Anderson argues newspapers and mail were instrumental in binding citizens together across wide geographic spaces making up a nation. The mail and newspapers gave individuals a feeling of connection. While Stowe's writings from Florida does support the power of print and mail as way of building a united nation, Stowe's didactic purpose is more personal and local. Stowe's highlighting the circulation of texts in Florida and how those texts are received is meant to serve as a model of reading and the appreciation of texts lost to many readers in the urban North.

² The effects of Frederick's injury during the Civil War were complicated by latter bouts with alcoholism. (John T. Foster 1999, 25, 44, and 46). Joan D. Hedrick address Frederick's wounding and mental illness in her biography of his mother (Hedrick 1994, 335-337).

³ Writing about the history of the Ocklawaha Valley, Steven Noll describes *Palmetto Leaves* as Stowe's "book on life as a northern homesteader (carpetbagger) in Florida" (13). Susan A. Eacker considers Stowe's Florida sojourns within in the context of gender and travel writing and in doing so emphasizes Stowe as a tourist.

⁴ Annie Fields' edited collection of Stowe's selected letters remains the most easily accessible collection of Stowe's letters. E. Bruce Kirkham compiled and edited Stowe's letters, but this collection remains unpublished and only accessible via computer at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut.

⁵ For a substantial recounting of Henry Ward Beecher's legal troubles see Applegate 391-425.

⁶ Joan D. Hedrick observes simply that "Florida in 1867 was a frontier country" and building off of Hedrick's understated claim about Florida, Susan A. Eacker observes that "Postbellum Florida was still a frontier, untamed by civilization" (Hedrick 330; Eacker 496). Stowe's depiction of Florida fits within the Nineteenth-Century American understanding of the frontier as a location lacking in extensive white civilization and settlement. Such definitions of the frontier largely ignore Native American populations and emphasize the elimination and removal of native populations. In seeking to challenge contemporary notions of the frontier and our understanding of native populations in North America, Daniel K. Richter notes, "the vast majority of eastern North America was neither English nor French nor Spanish territory" instead "it was, clearly, Indian country" (2-3). For the purposes of this essay, I emphasize Stowe's descriptions of Florida as a location lacking in transportation infrastructure and an extensive print culture of its own.

⁷ According to Zboray, railroads "not only dramatically improved the distribution of literature," they "changed the very context in which it was read" and "proved more conducive to reading than had other, earlier forms of transportation" (69, 73). Michael Winship similarly observes that "[a]s the nation expanded, traditional means of transportation—those using roads, coastal waterways, rivers, and canals—continued to be important, but the chief new development of the period was the introduction of the rail

network" (120). Improving transportation modes and networks drastically altered the way people consumed texts. Existing networks of river transportation coupled with a wider network of railroads broadened the reach of increased supplies of available print brought about by advances in print production. Such technological advances encouraged the diffusion of print and fundamentally altered people's relationship with it. The emergence of solitary reading on boats and trains also encouraged the consumption of texts in private in other locations and set up an opposition to shared reading practices. Zboray concludes "the railroad and the socioeconomic changes it represented shattered the exclusivity communities previously exercised over time-definition and granted more temporal autonomy to the individual" (Zboray 75).

⁸ Such interactions between Stowe and a geographically dispersed audience call to mind the creation of what Benedict Anderson has referred to as "imagined communities" extending across a nation which were facilitated by postal systems and the spread of print culture. However, scholars like Trish Loughran in *The Republic of Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* have pushed back against Anderson's work, citing its tendency to paint national trends with broad strokes that cannot be applied to all instances and circumstances. I concur with Loughran's assessment of the limitations of Anderson. Furthermore, I do not think Anderson's theories, given Stowe's focus on personal relationships, as opposed to national relationships, apply to *Palmetto Leaves*.

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