

## From the Archives: Alexander Hume Ford

When a new collection arrives at the South Carolina Historical Society, we never know what may turn up in it. Some time ago we received papers of the McCrady family, mostly those of Charleston attorney and former state representative Edward McCrady, Jr. A volunteer sorted through the collection to make a preliminary inventory and found what appeared to be a small collection of papers belonging to Alexander Hume Ford. A genealogical chart among the papers indicated that Ford was the son of Georgetown County planter Frederick W. Ford and Mary Mazyck Hume. He was apparently related to the McCrady family through his Hume connections. Alexander Hume Ford's papers mainly consist of correspondence from 1884 to 1891, along with miscellaneous items such as receipts, calling cards, and other ephemera.

Additional research revealed more information about Ford, some of it quite surprising. His mother died in childbirth and he was raised by a maiden aunt, Ellen. After graduating from Porter Military Academy in Charleston, he worked for the *News and Courier* until August 1886. Shortly afterwards he went to New York to work for John C. Calhoun, a financier who was the officer of several railroad companies and the grandson of the famed South Carolina statesman. Ford later worked as a freelance writer and playwright in New York and Chicago.

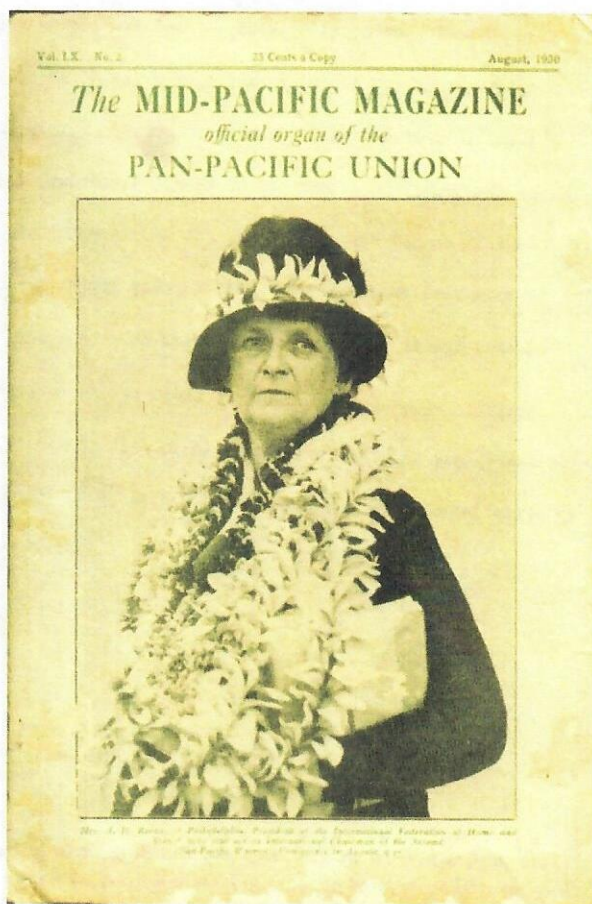
After Ford moved to New York, his uncle J. A. Hume wrote to him from McClellanville and warned the young man, "Take care of N.Y. & don't get cheated or hurt. It is the worst city in the world, full of every temptation of the worst sort." Though obviously very fond of him, Ford's

female relatives and friends also frequently admonished him in their correspondence (though they did express approval when they learned he was teaching Sunday school in New York). From these letters one forms the impression of Ford as an intelligent, good-natured, energetic young man, but also impulsive to the point of

occasional indiscretion and given to whimsy and practical jokes. In a letter dated July 17, 1886, Clelia McGowan (writing from Abbeville) warned him against flirting. "Do not fritter away the best emotions of the human heart," she wrote, "but rather treasure them up until you meet the one woman whom you can love and honor with your whole heart." His elderly aunt Emily Holmes responded to the news that her nephew Alex had become John C. Calhoun's "confidential clerk" with this suggestion: "You had better buy a padlock out of your first earnings and lock up that wagging tongue of yours, or you will get into trouble soon." Several letters of 1888 sternly scolded Ford for an embarrassing practical joke he played on his sister Mary.

In the early correspondence, there are a number of letters to Ford from Henry Porter Williams at Nacoochee, Georgia, and elsewhere, mainly relating to boyish activities of hunting, fishing, and the like. Also of note is a letter from M. DeLisle Haig dated August 14, 1889, which describes Morris Island and its immediate environs,

mentioning erosion as well as a creek that no longer exists and accompanied by a hand-drawn map of the area. In the undated correspondence, there is a handwritten invitation to a picnic on Sullivan's Island given by the Mikado Club. Miscellaneous items include a few records



*This August 1930 issue of the Mid-Pacific Magazine, the "official organ of the Pan-Pacific Union," included papers prepared for the Second Pan-Pacific Women's Conference. Among the articles are "Child Endowment in Australia," "Nationality of Married Women," "Public Health Service in the Netherlands East Indies," and "Kindergartens in Hawaii."*

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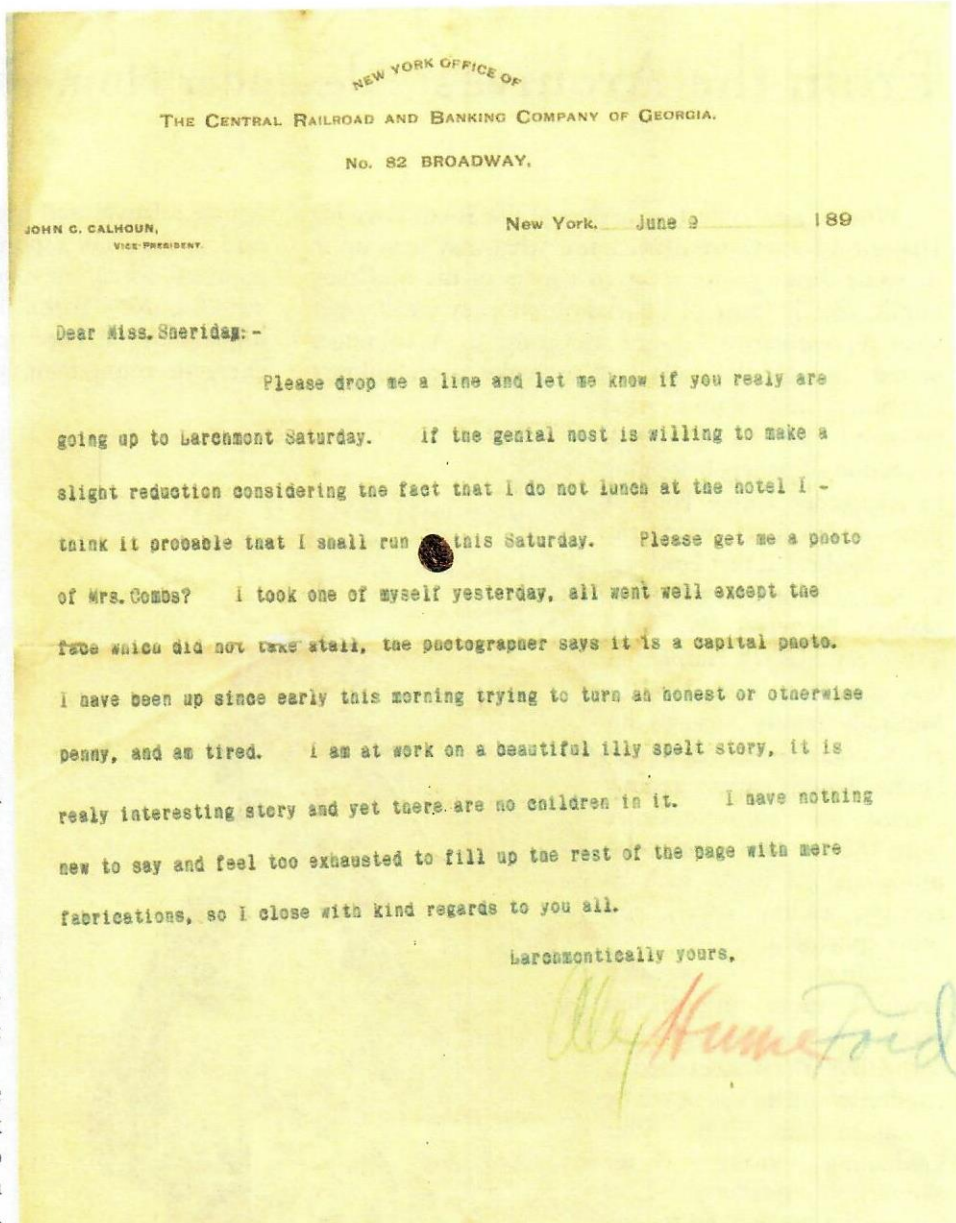


of Ford's membership in the New York Southern Society, the object of which was "to promote friendly relations between Southern men resident or temporarily sojourning in New York City, and to cherish and perpetuate the memories and traditions of the Southern people."

In 1899 he set out to travel abroad, writing articles on assignment for several well-known periodicals. He eventually settled in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1907. There, he became interested in surfing, an ancient native sport which had all but vanished by the early twentieth century. In 1908 Ford helped to establish the Outrigger Canoe Club, the purpose of which was to revive and preserve "surfing on boards and in outrigger canoes." Ford became an enthusiastic promoter of Hawaiian tourism and surfing, and was instrumental in forming the Pan-Pacific Union, an international organization aimed at fostering the interests of and harmony among the nations bordering the Pacific Ocean.

In Hawaii, Ford became friends with author Jack London, whom he taught to surf. In time, Ford's promotion of surfing, Hawaiian tourism, and the Pan-Pacific Union brought him some fame. He founded and edited the *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, a monthly publication that ran for twenty-six years, and worked tirelessly for two decades on behalf of the Pan-Pacific Union. His efforts to promote multi-racial and multi-ethnic harmony among the nations of the Pacific Rim, however, were ineffectual in his lifetime, and he became disillusioned. In a newspaper interview published in 1937, Ford acknowledged the futility of his work and stated, "I'm never again going to try to understand other people or other nations."

Alexander Hume Ford never married, and he died on the island of Oahu in 1945 at the age of seventy-seven. He



*Ford's papers housed at the Fireproof Building include frequent correspondence with a Mattie Sheridan. Though Ford appears to have been a close friend and regular escort for Miss Sheridan, his letters to her indicate an interest in her niece. Presumably the "Larchmont" referred to in this letter references a village on Long Island Sound that served as a resort community for wealthy New Yorkers around the turn of the twentieth century.*

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is buried in the cemetery of the Prince George Winyah Episcopal Church in Georgetown. The only full biography of Ford, authored by Valerie Noble, was published in 1980 as *Hawaiian Prophet*. More than one hundred years after Ford founded it, the Outrigger Canoe Club near Waikiki Beach is still in operation today, boasting an international reputation for its spectacular location and its efforts to foster and promote Hawaiian water sports.—Karen Stokes