

# On the road with Jane Caroline North

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD AND  
DAVID WALBERT

From Jane Caroline North Diary: Volume 1. [Transcript] Southern Texts Society, Southern Historical Collection # 4716 Unit #1. Original Diary: Pettigrew Family Papers Collection # 592, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Series 3.4 Folder 532.

## As you read...

In this excerpt from her diary of 1851, Jane Caroline North describes her experiences traveling from South Carolina to Virginia to the mineral springs of western Virginia. Part of her route ran through North Carolina, and although she was able to travel part of the way by railroad, her experience shows how complicated and inconvenient travel could still be in the 1850s.

### JANE CAROLINE NORTH

Jane Caroline North, known as “Carey” to her family, was about 23 and still unmarried in 1851. She had grown up in Charleston, South Carolina, in a “respectable” — fairly wealthy — family. She was very much a “southern belle” — or at least she deliberately played that part. The playfully superior attitude she sometimes took in her journal was part of that role.

In 1854 Jane North married her cousin Charles Lochart Pettigrew and moved to North Carolina. Her husband’s family owned thousands of acres and several plantations in North Carolina. Charles and Jane inherited Bonarva Plantation in Tyrrell County. They had eight children together, but they faced great hardships during the Civil War, and after the war they struggled financially. Charles died in 1873, and Jane lost their plantations in the 1880s. She died in 1887.

### MINERAL SPRINGS

Jane North was traveling to Warm Springs, Virginia, which is northwest of Lynchburg near the present-day border with West Virginia. (West Virginia did not separate from Virginia until 1863, during the Civil War.) That region of Virginia was known for its mineral springs, and is home to several towns named for them. Some mineral springs — springs whose water is rich in minerals — are naturally heated, hence the name “warm springs” or “hot springs.”

Bathing in mineral springs was believed to promote general health and to cure specific illnesses and conditions. In the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century, resorts and spas were created at the sites of natural mineral springs — such as Asheville — and people traveled hundreds of miles to visit them. Discoveries about the causes of disease in the late 1800s and 1900s caused mineral baths to fall out of

favor, but the idea of “spring water” as something healthful still exists in our culture — as you will notice if you look at the prices of bottled water at the grocery store!

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. North traveled by boat, train, and horse drawn carriage. What did she say about each of these modes of transportation? Which one do you think was the most comfortable? The most efficient?
2. How did North describe the towns she passed through? Which ones did she find pleasant? Which ones did she find unpleasant?
3. In Richmond, what tourist sites did she and her family visit? What caught her attention about the city?
4. How did North describe the landscape of North Carolina? of Virginia?
5. What did North have to say about the men and women she encountered?
6. Where did North and her family sleep and eat on their travels? How did she describe their accommodations? The food they ate?

## Thursday July 31

Uncle Henry Aunt Harriette the two children myself & Betsey as attendant left Charleston on Board the Wilmington Boat Vanderbilt at 4 o'clock p.m. Many persons on board among them several acquaintances—

## August 1st

We had a disagreeable night, it rain thundered and lightened the whole time. Fortunately for us we were accommodated with a State room<sup>1</sup> on deck, the weather was very hot and if we had been moved into the berths below the Saloon, would certainly have been near the end of our days before morning. As it was we suffered sharply — Smithville<sup>2</sup> is the most desolate looking spot shabby houses and piles running out into the river giving an appearance of decay & at the same time reminding me of what I read of Old Dutch towns with their defences projecting into the sea. Wilmington is a considerable place, somewhat resembling Georgetown<sup>3</sup> except it has a prosperous air. We went from the Boat to the Cars<sup>4</sup>, on board which we waited an hour or more, finally set off. The country is a dead level, pine trees, grass and turpentine barrels rolled beside the road ready for export — certainly this portion of N. Carolina does not make the most favorable impression. We passed over beautiful Savanna<sup>5</sup> cover'd with grass and wild flowers, bordering the road for ½ mile on each side & only bounded by the horizon one very fine orchard, & one fine field of corn were the only interesting objects I saw in the distance of 166 miles or more! We supped at Weldon where we changed for Petersburg Va — There are opposition houses at Weldon much to the advantage of travelers<sup>6</sup> — we had a nice supper & capital<sup>7</sup> tea at Greshams. From eight until after 12 o'clock at night we were in the cars going from Weldon to Petersburg. There was a shelf sufficiently wide for a person to be comfortable upon extending around the *[illegible]* above the seat, on this as many men as could get on it were sleeping while those who could accommodate themselves upon the seat. We had every variety of attitude, some highly ridiculous. At Petersburg we rested 2 hours then took

the Cars for Richmond. I was surprised to find this route so good, having always been told that it was the worst in the Union.

## Sat 2d



Figure 1. Jean-Antoine Houdon's statue of George Washington in the rotunda of the Virginia State Capitol may be the most accurate likeness of the man.

Arrived in Richmond about  $\frac{1}{2}$  past six, the morning very cool, a shawl would have been pleasant. The approach to the Town is very pretty, we crossed the James river by a long very high bridge, the houses appear as if built one above another in almost regular lines. The hills are high and with a little fancy one might suppose the buildings, castles perched upon their summits. We stopped first at the American Hotel. Uncle Henry had to return to the Depot for my poor carpet bag<sup>8</sup> which was reported missing, he was just in time to save the captive from being carried to Washington — it was a great relief to have it back again. The hotel had been newly painted, it was handsomely furnished but in a state of transition from the “horrors to the decent.” The paint was more than Aunt Harrie could bear so after breakfasting (and very nicely too) we changed our quarters and obtained pleasant rooms at the “Powhatan.” I feel now as if really in old Virginny the engine that puffed us here was the Pocahantas, & the hotel at which we stay bears the name of the famous old Indian chief! Everything has looked so like home even the bareness of the North Carolina belt, (with the exception of the turpentine barrels) that I did not realize the distance that separated me from home. After resting a short time Uncle Henry the children & myself walked to the capitol, saw Houdon's statue of Washington<sup>9</sup> & looked at the view from the high portico — we looked in the Representative & Senate chambers also — these are not so comfortable as those in Columbia & the floors were excessively dirty. I was disappointed in the statue; the face is quite different from the representations we usually see of Washington it is more full & looks heavy — the dress is admirable, the large flapped waistcoat, the hair in cue<sup>10</sup>, the old fashioned coat, the whole in excellent keeping & representing the dress of the time 1789 I think — the usual mode of draping statues of public men does not seem to me a correct one, why should they not be sculpted in the dress of their on time instead of enveloping them in Greek or Roman robes? Our dinner today was not so good as our breakfast — the bill of fare was defective in as much as there were dishes put down in the catalogue not to be found on the table. Peaches & milk were handed as dessert, the saucer half filled with sliced over peaches covered with lumps of ice to this was add sugar & milk. I did not approve the arrangement. There were but 2 ladies at the table, men enough however — Since we left S.C. I have been struck by the difference in negroes. Yesterday I thought them the most sturdy saucy looking set, & since entering VA — every other one is a mulatto. I have never seen so many as meandered around the tables of the “American” this morning & at dinner at this house it is really pleasant to see the true ebony & them to me quite distinguished.

We took a charming drive this afternoon through & about the City. It is best seen from two views, one from Gable's Hill where the City seems chiefly to lie to your left hand the fine Railroad bridge before you & James River dotted with patches of little green Islands almost at your feet & sliding & stretching away before you — the other view is from the top of a very high hill just above the port of the town, called I think Rockets. The view from this point is finer than the other from Gable's Hill, the elevation is greater than any other place, one stands higher than the Capitol which building is conspicuous from every point,

crowning a hill on the midst of the new City. What strikes me with surprise is the number & height of the hills. New & old Richmond are situated on & between them so that the effect is very curious & very pretty. Many of the streets are steep & rough as our backcountry roads. The hill on which we last stood I thought inaccessible looking up at it from Main St winding at its foot, several turns & windings brought us to the top — the river was beneath the beyond & below us. Over the river stretched the richest looking country, the corn of the darkest green & numberless wheat stacks scattered over the fields, the whole seemed “smiling in the lap of Plenty.” We passed a church said to be very old; the hill had been cut down at least 30 feet on one side to make a street, the brick wall was built up against it forming a parapet & overhanging the edge in one or two places were some old monuments — the effect was very curious. After our delightful drive we took an ice cream, very nice & much more than they give in Charleston for the same money.

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## Monday 4th

We took the Cars for Charlottesville this morning arrived to dinner — the hotel was a most distracted place; ill furnished, poorly kept — The dinner was a scene of confusion & discomfort — the landlord before the bell rang requested anxiously that the ladies would seat themselves at table otherwise they would get no seats after that. Soon as the summons rung out (we being established before hand,) such rushing in of rough looking men I never saw. Oh! They were desperate specimens — it was Court week & the town was filled with all sorts of queer, hard visaged people — they ate furiously & everything together. I was amazed at being handed ice-cream after dinner, it was like a gleam of civilization in the midst of barbarism. Uncle Henry engaged an extra with Dr. Holmes, & as soon as possible we set off for Brooksville 20 miles distant. We passed the University a mile from the Town, it is a handsome building. Our party consists of Dr Holmes & wife, Jr John Gadsden who is traveling with them, and ourselves.

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## Tuesday 5th

Left Brookville (merely a way side hotel) for Staunton<sup>H</sup> early, we were today fairly among the Blue Ridge, they certainly correspond to the name, tho' I don't know that they looked any more blue than other mountains, the country until we entered the mountainous regions was destitute of any beauty, today we have had several pretty scenes, & glimpses of

the more distant ranges, looming through their “azure hue.” Dined at Staunton, the situation of this town is very striking, among steep hills with the Mountains beyond. On each side of the street entering the Town are handsome public buildings on the asylum for the deaf & dumb the Principals of which are a gentleman & his wife both deaf & dumb — I did not hear what the opposite building was intended for. The hotel was a nice one & the arrangements appeared very comfortable, the dinner well conducted and very good. I saw white waiters for the first time since entering Virginia here at the hotel of this inland Town perched among the high hills bordering the mountain country. This is a flourishing place, & when the rail road is finished connecting it with Charlottesville, it doubtless will be of great importance. We passed today a place where they are tunneling thro’ a mountain; the work has been in progress three years, and will be finished it is said in one more, the embanking for the railroad is finished in many places, it was a great work to undertake, filling up sufficiently in the valleys tunneling thro a mountain and overcoming many obstacles they have had to encounter in the route. We changed the stage at Staunton, & left in a rain, the distance to Cloverdale<sup>12</sup> being 30 miles — fortunately it soon cleared, we traveled well but it was ten o’clock at night before we reached our resting place. We were very tired — the children had been asleep two or three hours before we stopped, they have stood the journey very well so far.

## Wed 6th

We did not leave Cloverdale until nine o’clock having but 20 miles to the Warm Springs<sup>13</sup>. The road is turnpike it is made over the mountains nearly the whole way, & commanding beautiful points of view & in excellent order. From one height I was reminded of the view of Caesar Head,<sup>14</sup> tho it was neither so fine nor so extensive. After a drive of 15 miles we drove into the “Bath Alum Springs” where the horses were to be watered. These Springs have not been discovered long, this is only the second season. The hotel is of red brick the cottages are pretty little buildings, but must be very hot. The sun was shining his fiercest as we drove up, and the bricks seemed to me really flaming. In a book on the Virginia Springs by Dr. Burke,<sup>15</sup> he describes these of Bath Alum<sup>16</sup> as very delightful & gives the most refreshing account of the trees & ornamental grounds, the shrubbery &c I looked in vain for any semblance of all this, a row of bare poles & a carriage way comprised every beauty to be seen. He drew from that never failing source an Irish imagination. At length at 4 o’clock in the afternoon we arrived at the Warm Springs, I felt a little scared I must admit when we got out dusty, weary & travel worn and saw people standing about, on the staircase we met a lady dressed in white bobbinet<sup>17</sup> & looking so nice that I thought it would be a desperate undertaking to prepare for dinner, so weary as we were. This trouble was removed to my satisfaction when I found that the hour for dinner had long passed & we were only with our own party. Dressed for the evening<sup>18</sup>, few people here — some old gentlemen & ladies chiefly.

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### Notes

1. A *state room* on a boat or ship is a first-class cabin, one of the best rooms available.
2. Smithville Township is located in Brunswick County, North Carolina. It is a seaport town on the border between North and South Carolina.
3. Georgetown, South Carolina, is a seaport sixty miles north of Charleston. It is one of the oldest cities in South Carolina.
4. Railroad cars.
5. The savanna, or grassland, she saw was the longleaf pine savanna. In this now-rare type of forest, which once covered much of the southeastern United States, tall longleaf pines grew spaced far enough for a carriage to pass easily, with grasses and wildflowers between them.
6. An *opposition house* was a “house” or hotel providing accommodations to travelers, set up in opposition to (in competition with) the main hotel of a town or village. She is saying that the competition has improved services to travelers.
7. *Capital* was a way of saying “excellent.”
8. A carpet bag was a piece of luggage made out of an old carpet. It was a fashionable type of baggage during the nineteenth century.
9. Jean-Antoine Houdon was an eighteenth-century French sculptor and was one of the most important artists of his time. He was asked by the Thomas Jefferson, on behalf of the Virginia state legislature, to create a sculpture of Washington. Houdon traveled from France to Washington’s plantation Mount Vernon. He spent two weeks creating a mold of Washington before returning to France to complete the sculpture. As such, it is considered the most accurate representation of the first American president.  
  
By depicting Washington in his eighteenth century clothing instead of Roman garb, Houdon broke with artistic traditions. In the eighteenth century, it was customary to depict public leaders in the clothing of ancient Rome or Greece. It was assumed that by borrowing the artistic styles of Rome and Greece for public works of art, the artist would inspire people to live up to the democratic values of Rome and Greece.
10. A *queue* or *cue* of hair is a ponytail at the back, as men wore in the eighteenth century.
11. Staunton, Virginia, is about fifty miles east of Charlottesville.
12. Cloverdale, Virginia is 78 miles southwest of Staunton.
13. Warms Springs, Virginia is about 100 miles west of Charlottesville.

14. Caesar Head is a mountain near Cleveland, South Carolina. It is located approximately 45 miles south of Asheville.
15. In 1832, William Burke published a book titled *The Mineral Springs of Western Virginia*.
16. Bath Alum is a town near Warm Spring and Hot Springs, Virginia. Alum is a type of mineral salt, for which the baths were named.
17. Bobbinet is imitation lace made from cotton.
18. Wealthy Europeans and Americans at this time dressed formally for dinner.

## Contributors

### L. MAREN WOOD

Maren Wood is a research associate with LEARN NC's North Carolina History Digital Textbook Project. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, having received a B.A. from the University of Lethbridge (Alberta, Canada) and an M.A. in British History from Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada). Her dissertation is titled *Dangerous Liaisons: Narratives of Sexual Danger in the Anglo-American North, 1750 to 1820*.

### DAVID WALBERT

David Walbert is Editorial and Web Director for LEARN NC in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education. He is responsible for all of LEARN NC's educational publications, oversees development of various web applications including LEARN NC's website and content management systems, and is the organization's primary web, information, and visual designer. He has worked with LEARN NC since August 1997.

David holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. With LEARN NC, he has written numerous articles for K–12 teachers on topics such as historical education, visual literacy, writing instruction, and technology integration.

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### Figure 1 (page 3)

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