

7-1-1931

A Letter of Alexander H. Stephens

M. L. Crimmins

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Crimmins, M. L.. "A Letter of Alexander H. Stephens." *New Mexico Historical Review* 6, 3 (1931).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol6/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

A LETTER OF ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS

COLONEL M. L. CRIMMINS

THE state of Georgia has recently presented to the Statuary Hall in the Capitol at Washington, a statue of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, by Gutzon Borglum. This remarkable man was born in 1812 and died in his seventy-first year. He was vice-president of the Confederacy, a senator from Georgia and served five terms in Congress, until elected governor of Georgia in 1882. He was a statesman, author and patriot, and his character may be judged by the following statement which appears on the base of his statue, "I am afraid of nothing on earth, above the earth, beneath the earth, except to do wrong."

He was born near Crawford, Taliaferro County, Georgia, February 11, 1812, and graduated from the University of Georgia at Athens at the age of twenty. He taught school and studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1834. He was a member of the Georgia house of representatives from 1836 to 1841; state senator in 1842, and served in congress from 1843 to 1859. He was a presidential elector on the democratic ticket of Douglass and Johnson in 1860, and became vice-president of the Confederacy in 1861. After the Civil War, he was imprisoned at Fort Warren, Boston Harbor, for five months, and was released in October, 1865. He was elected United States senator in 1866, and served in congress from 1873 to 1882. His total service to his state and nation covered a period of thirty-nine years.

His father, Andrew Baskins Stephens, was of English descent, and his mother was Margaret Grier, of Irish descent, not a bad combination for a fighter. His mother died when he was only three months old, and his father died when he was fourteen. In his character was observed a marked blending of the traits of his parents. He was

thrifty, generous, progressive, and always as tender and pure as a child, and he lived up to the following passages of the scriptures, which he often repeated, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and "Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man." Physically he was very remarkable. He grew until he was twenty-seven years of age, and his last teeth did not appear until that time. Although he was five feet ten inches tall he never weighed over one hundred one and a half pounds. His legs were unusually long and his face so youthful looking that he had been told to get up from his seat in a street car for an older person, because he looked like a boy. He looked so frail that he was not expected to live, he suffered a great deal from severe abscesses, and he often would weigh not more than eighty pounds. Yet he was not afraid to fight, and was wounded eighteen times in a knife duel with Judge Francis H. Cone. He had a debate with Judge Cone, and the judge becoming angry, cried, "You little slim, emaciated, dried up runt! I could pin your ears and swallow you whole." To which Stephens replied, "And if you did, kind sir, you would have more brains in your belly than you have in your head."

Stephens made every effort to preserve the Union under the constitution and he foresaw the evils of secession, which he foretold in a speech at Augusta in 1860. He refused the nomination for president of the United States at a Charleston convention in 1860, and it was due to his efforts that Georgia did not secede as promptly as did South Carolina and other states.

The following remarkable and characteristic letter is a copy of one in the archives of the library of the University of Texas:

House of Representatives, July 3, 1850.

To the Editor.

Gentlemen:

In your paper of this morning I notice the following editorial:

"We take it for granted that there is foundation, of some kind or other, for the statement in the following extract from the Washington correspondence of the *New York Journal of Commerce*. If it be really true, the gallant state of Texas is about to march an army into the territories of the United States, and against an armed station of the United States within them; and we are to have news of it in less than six weeks from this time. Let us hope, however, that the worthy correspondent of the *Journal* is prematurely alarmed for the safety of Santa Fe and the detachment of the army who's duty it will be to defend it.

Correspondence of the Journal of Commerce

Washington, Saturday, June 29, 1850.

There will be some startling intelligence from Texas in less than six weeks from this time. Texas will send an adequate force at once, as is supposed, to effect her objects—probably 2,500 men. There are at Santa Fe about two hundred Texas camp followers, who take an interest in favor of the Texans. The troops of the United States, under Colonel Monroe, number about five or six hundred, to which six hundred are about to be added. The Texans in this city are of the opinion that Texas, supported as she is by the sympathies of the whole South, will arrest the United States military officers, and bring them to trial for obstructing the operation of her laws. Should the adjustment bill be defeated, there is no doubt that Texas will absorb New Mexico, and if the United States interfere the Southern States will give her all the aid she needs."

From this it seems that you hold it to be the "duty" of the "army" of the United States now stationed at Santa Fe to defend without authority of law, the military occupation of that portion of New Mexico lying this side of the Rio

Grande against any attempt of Texas to maintain her claim by extending her jurisdiction over it.

Your right to entertain such an opinion it is not my object to question. But I wish to say to you, lest you may be mistaken in the opinion of others, that the first *Journal gun* that shall be fired against the people of Texas, without authority of law, will be the signal for the freemen from the Delaware to the Rio Grande to rally to the rescue. Whatever difference of opinion may exist in the public mind, touching the proper boundary of Texas, nothing can be clearer [than] that it is not a question to be decided by the army. Be not deceived, and deceive not others. "*Inter arma leges silent.*" When the "Rubicon" is passed, the days of the Republic will be numbered. You may consider the "gallant state of Texas" too weak for a contest with [an] army of the United States. But you should recollect that the cause of Texas, in such a conflict will be the cause of the entire South. And whether you consider Santa Fe in danger or not, you may yet live to see that fifteen states of this Union with seven millions of people who, knowing their rights, dare maintain them, cannot be easily conquered! *Sapientibus verbum sat.*

Yours most respectfully,

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.