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**Transcribed Letter, 1837 Nov. 19 from
John G. Smedberg (in Greenville, S.C.) to Hugh C. Young
(in Saugerties, N.Y.)**

With Addendum, 23 Nov. 1837

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Background

J.G. Smedberg was an engineer and surveyor from New York working in western North and South Carolina on a route for a railroad line; Smedberg may also have been a graduate of the United States Military Academy (West Point, N.Y.)

Accession Number: 2281

Summary

Cross-hatched letter from John G.Smedberg who was employed as an engineer working in the rugged mountainous area near Flat Rock in western North Carolina; he also writes of working at Greenville, S.C., and Limestone Springs (Cherokee County, S.C.)

Smedberg writes that he was employed by the "C.L. & C. R[oad] Road" [possibly the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston Railroad]; his letter describes the climate and landscape, "...my duties in... the roughest country you

ever saw.... We worked harder if possible than on Broad River.....” and the fine meals he and his men had enjoyed in camp; Smedberg’s purchase of a young horse from a Kentucky drover; social activities and rowdy behavior of the men in his camp; interaction with female guests from the lowcountry of S.C. who were spending the summer in the mountains; and a reunion of the West Point Glee Club; and late nights spent singing and drinking porter beer.

Editorial Note

Smedberg wrote this letter using cross-hatched text by which he wrote three pages, then rotated the sheet ninety degrees and added four more pages of information. This practice saved paper and postage and remained common and familiar to 19th-century readers. Today, however, cross-hatched letters appear virtually illegible to most twenty-first century researchers. South Caroliniana Library thanks Aaron Marrs for his transcription of this letter.

Dear Hugh,

I very much fear that I have been some scores of times, consigned by you to a place which is seldom if ever represented as filled with cold water, for not having had the civility to answer the last epistle, which left the Tivoli P[ost] O[ffice] (Dutchess County, N.Y.) directed to John G. Smedberg, S.C. However, better late than never, so I sit down to give you a regular journal of what has occurred, touching your humble servant, down here since I last wrote hoping that you will forgive my egotism, and at the same time consider me excused by circumstances for having so long neglected you be it understood that I am now writing in the dark or nearly so, which will account for my popping up and down in such graceful curves between the lines, as though I would go on not waiting for a light, which however, is just come, so now for copperplate -

Soon after I wrote to you I was ordered to Flat Rock N[orth] Caro[lina] by Capt. Williams, and as soon as I got there (17th Aug) though still weak after my illness, was ordered down to Green River to join Mr Whites' party as leveller so I struck off for their camp and the day after my arrival commenced my duty in a little [of] the roughest country that you ever saw, reckoning. We could not advance with the minuteness and accuracy necessary more than a quarter of a mile a day as great parts of the ground required to be run over four

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or five times before leaving it. We worked harder if possible than on Broad River; being so much pushed toward the last as to work two Sundays in the field.

However we enjoyed ourselves to the utmost in camp, having an excellent opportunity to make ourselves comfortable, as we remained encamped in the same place for two weeks or more, and were allowed a cook and waggoner by the company, the latter of whom had nothing to do but cater for us between the periods of moving. I do not think that I ever passed a pleasanter six weeks in my life than those that we spent on Green River.

The latter part of the time, the compassman of Mr White's original party and myself were detached to mark a revision of certain parts of four lines he having received several more assistants to carry on the main line.

We had a most jolly time of it, having a party under us of 13 capable hands, and our camp consisting of four tents being pitched right in the midst of a wild uninhabited forest, in one of the prettiest little spots that I ever beheld.

The nearest house was upwards of two miles off but in spite of that we managed to get as luxurious a collection of the good things of this life as may well be, besides chickens, duck, beef, muttoms and the other substantials of life, we had peach brandy, cognac, cigars (real

Havanas) apples, pears, peaches, grapes, water and musk melon, all sorts of vegetables, honey, milk and cream and besides many of things too numerous to mention some exquisite Mocha coffee

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for which Mr White had sent to Charleston [S.C.].

To crown all the delights of female society (such as it was) were not wanting as all the pretty farmer's daughters came from all about to see the engineer who of course received them so well that they could not do less than come again.

I received your letter while we were in the camp about the 10th of September, it having been delayed in the forwarding to Flat Rock, [N.C.], but had scarcely time to write a weekly bulletin home much less to bore you with my nonsense - -

When the other party went to Flat Rock [N.C.] I was left for several days alone, with the workings here of the party, examining one or two ravines that ha[d] been overlooked before and when I [to] got F[lat] Rock, [____? *paper missing*] was hard at work till 10 every night, getting my pro[perty? *wax seal covers text*] ready and doing my share of the estimates to be ready for the meeting of directors, Oct 10th.

I was then ordered down to Greenville [S.C.] to assist Livingston in finishing his office duty which was completed about 3 weeks ago, & soon after the news came down that the directors had determined to give all the rodmen, and those who had not received at the commencement of the season, opportunity of a higher character \$1.50 per [day? up to at .20? (*illegible - see page 3*)] and then to dismiss a number of them or what was the same thing, to reduce their pay to \$1 per day. I was among the number who received this offer, which I declined accepting but on speaking about it to Maj. McNeill, he gave me a letter to

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Capt. Williams, who, he said would give me employment in a survey, under government of the Cherokee reservation, for two or three months, when the C. L + C. R Road is expected to be carried on with more vigor. I gave the letter to Capt W[illia]ms who gave me a situation at \$750 in the office here finishing the maps, left, in many instances, incomplete.

Capt W[illia]ms on resigning the associate engineership was appointed by the company to superintend the finishing of these maps, which will take two months or so. He has four or five assistants under him, whom I find very pleasant associates. I am now enjoying myself very much here. The weather is most delightful, though the evenings are cool the middle of the day is sometimes quite oppressive.

The roses are yet in bloom, and the trees are scarcely stripped of their leaves. I am now sitting without my coat, with the windows up, the fire having been allowed to go nearly out, but this evening is rather warmer than usual.

The other day I bought a most beautiful little full blooded mare from a Kentucky drover.

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She is very young, very little used to the saddle, and consequentially, as skittish as may well be. She capsized me twice over her bows, by stopping short, when racing with another horse but within the last two or three days has become much more gentle and I think after a few weeks riding will become a most pleasant saddle nag, as her places are remarkably easy, and she is quite fast. I did not hurt myself by the falls as I pitched clear of her by 12 or 15 feet alighting once directly on my feet, after a regular summerset.

We take a ride every afternoon after office hours, and with the aid of an indifferent billiard table and a small circulating library here and the society of some pleasant fellows here, I hope and expect to pass my leisure hours very pleasantly.

I am afraid however that we shall not have much to say to "*le beau sexe*" [i.e. fair sex] as all the young ladies that have been staying here for the last month or so and with whom I had some very delicious flirtations, have been driven by the approach of the cool season to their homes lower down the country and the fair inhabitants of Greenville [S.C.] do not seem to be any thing very extraordinary, although I have not yet made any very strong efforts upon their hearts, finding the low country

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belles so very agreeable, but perhaps I may be able to write you something more satisfactory in my next. I hope so.

After having been confined to the pleasant-in-its-way but rather unrefined society of Green River for so long, and that too after having had such pleasant times at Limestone Springs [Cherokee County, S.C.], you cannot conceive how I enjoyed myself when I came down here and found some half dozen pretty agreeable and lady-like girls staying at the same hotel with myself and all ripe for a frolic. It was an extreme caution to all engineers.

We have had several very high sprees here, among others, one night we kicked up the very devil all about the town first having serenaded all the women that we knew in the place and then frightening half the men out of their wits pulling down fences and doing all sorts of ridiculous mischief. Consequence was that we were hauled up next day, about 15 of us, on two or three indictments. However, as we had all the ladies on our side, and as the men were afraid that they might bring a nest of hornets

about their ears we got off by paying 3 or 4 dollars apiece and there the affair ended.

We have had some of t[he] finest music here that I

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ever heard; there were three of the old West Point Glee Club, on this road: Campbell, Adams + Smith, and they all met here on the settling of accounts. They had not all three met before since they left W[est] Point, and of course were practising over all their old glees. I never enjoyed any music so much; we used to order in at night two or three dozen of porter and sit up singing and drinking till 12 or 1 o'clock, and continued in this way for two or three weeks, diversified by an occasional serenade. Besides these gentlemen, we had five or six others who sang remarkably well so that we had a great variety. I think I have fired a pretty heavy charge at you already so with kind remembrances to all your family,

I remain y[ou]rs sincerely,
John G. Smedberg

Write to me as soon as you can, and direct to Greenville, South Carolina. I expect after finishing the maps to get an appointment on the road again, if not I shall most probably return home.

[An addendum written four days later on back of the "envelope" of this stampless cover.]

Nov. 23.

[1837]

I had just put this in the office when I heard that a letter had arrived from Charleston [S.C.] directing that only the most urgently required maps should be finished at present so that I and another of the assistants would be no more required here, the remaining three being sufficient.

I think I shall go down to Columbia [S.C.] and remain a week or two until the meeting of directors takes place if there appears any chance of my getting a situation. If not I shall return home I should not have sent this letter but I have no time to write another and thought you would like to know of my movements so I got it out of the office and opened it to let you know. I think it very probably that I shall get a situation perhaps even before the meeting as Maj. McNeill promised me one as soon as possible. You may direct to Columbia [S.C.] instead of Greenville [S.C.].

Good bye.