## SOCIETY PURCHASES LETTER FROM JOHN A. CAMPBELL TO BENJAMIN ROBBINS CURTIS

As part of its effort to commemorate the role of the Supreme Court and its Justices during the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the Supreme Court Historical Society recently acquired an important letter from the period. The correspondents are two former Justices who were perhaps most affected by the events leading up to the war, Benjamin R. Curtis, who served from 1851-1857, and John A. Campbell, who served description of the failed peace conference at Hampton Roads in February 1865, during which time he met with President Abraham Lincoln hoping to discuss terms of peace and Reconstruction. It was during the period following Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, that Campbell was arrested on May 30, 1865.

Interestingly, Campbell claims to not know why he had

from 1853-1861. Curtis had resigned following the *Dred Scott* decision and Campbell had done so at the outbreak of the War. Although the men had little contact over the years, Campbell wrote to his former colleague to seek assistance in obtaining his release from prison.

Writing from federal prison at Fort Pulaski, Georgia on July 20, 1865, Campbell chronicles his activities during the Civil War, including his service in the Confederate government. Although Campbell had firmly resisted the idea of secession prior to the War, he felt obligated to resign from the Court and return to his home in Alabama when hostilities began. In October 1862, he was asked to serve as Assistant Secretary of War for the Confederacy, a position he accepted reluctantly but one in which he hoped "to be of use in

114. Fort Pulistie Georgia 200 Lacy bi My Lear Sir I learn that you those rulespend in my lichalf, to altern my release from arrest them finement. I am ablight by your interporter I appreciate it the more, because That the war has make no change in my feeling trans young. You on awan that I was not a patron or friend of the deception movement. My curden nation up it I my continuence in the Juk court, were regardece as acts for which there cauld be no tolerance. When I relarmed to alabama in May 1861 it was to recive caldnep, avenia, or cutiendy for the section papalater. I did not apre to recent what I had lord or to explain what I had done I thus, instead of office . my apprendice my afferer this was state more age that Privaturing would not explice northern cur merce for the accep but would append Eusapean opinion & that Prevaluesie, & slowing would prevent recepition I that the wor would be long templacable

been imprisoned, writing, "I should be glad to know why I am arrested and detained." Only later would he learn that it was on suspicion of conspiracy in President Lincoln's assassination. Eventually, Campbell was released from prison in October 1865, largely due to efforts on the part of his family and friends, including former Justice Curtis.

This letter was first published as "A View of the Confederacy From the Inside" in Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine (Volume 38, October 1889). Since that time, it has served as a valuable resource for historians in understanding the activities of the Confederate government during the Civil War. At its new home at the Supreme Court, the letter will be preserved while continuing to be a source for understanding the long-lasting bond that often forms between Justices,

mitigating the evils that were upon the country."

Campbell goes on to describe the conditions in the South during the Civil War, including the disarray of Confederate finances, the lack of support for troops, and conflict within the Confederate leadership. Campbell became increasingly convinced of the need to end the war on the best possible terms for the Southern States. Featured in the letter is Campbell's transcending distance, time, and even war.

An annotated transcript of the letter is planned for a future volume of the Society's *Journal*. The first page of which is printed above.

\*Information based on transcript and the book "John A. Campbell: Southern Moderate" by Robert Saunders, Jr.