

# AN AMERICAN IN MALTA IN 1842

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Henry Shelton Sanford (1823-91), a native of Derby, Connecticut, U.S.A., was a wealthy business man who enjoyed a distinguished career in Europe in the service of his country (1). He served from 1849-1853 as Secretary of the American Legation in Paris, France, and from 1861-1869 as the American Minister to Belgium (2). Further recognition of his merits gained him the post of representative of the American Geographical Society at the African International Conference of 1876 and the position as representative of the United States at the Berlin Conference of 1884. He worked hard for the abolition of the liquor traffic and the slave trade in the Congo. During the 1880's he played an important role in the Florida Land and Colonization Society of which he became the president and the largest stockholder. He founded in central Florida the town of Sanford where his extensive papers are now housed in a memorial library (3).

Even as a youth Sanford had visited the Old World, noting his experience and impressions. At the age of nineteen he made a trip from Boston to Smyrna, Constantinople, Malta, Sicily, and the Italian peninsula. In a long holograph letter of November, 1842, written to his mother from Palermo, young Sanford recorded his visit to Malta. This personal letter, hitherto unpublished, has interest and value as providing the contemporary observations of a versatile and alert young man keenly concerned with what he saw in his travels (4). Only the first part of the letter, which describes Malta, is given here because the last part of the missive comments on Sicily. In the reproduction of this letter the original spelling and inconsistent capitalization are retained. For the sake of clarity, however, it has seemed desirable to introduce paragraphs and to add some punctuation. Some examples of a word being written twice have been silently corrected.

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1. There is no adequate biography of Henry Shelton Sanford.
  2. This was President Lincoln's first diplomatic appointment.
  3. In May, 1959, the papers were loaned to the Tennessee State Library and Archives for processing and microfilming. The original documents, however, are now all housed in Sanford, Florida, and are the property of that city.
  4. This document is catalogued among the Sanford papers, Box 2, folder 11.

## A LETTER TO HIS MOTHER ABOUT MALTA

Palermo, Nov. 28th, 1842.

Dearest Mother,

We arrived here yesterday from Messina and as there are American vessels here I cannot let the opportunity pass without sending you some information respecting your wandering son. I dispatched a letter from the Quarantine Malta which I had written while in the Steam Boat and which probably went in company with a long tedious letter of two closely written sheets which I had written in Constantinople. I remained fourteen days in quarantine in the Lazzaretto at Malta and after leaving it remained in Malta six days in waiting for a vessel for Sicily. While there, of course, I examined all that was interesting. The transition from the narrow and filthy street of Smyrna and Constantinople to the clean broad and well paved streets of Malta was striking. The streets there are some of them built like long stair cases, being nothing more than flights of steps, but are well paved and clean and what is a great comfort they have broad and capacious sidewalks. The streets are paved with square flat stones well laid and vehicles going over them make little more noise than with the wooden pavements with us. The houses are nearly all handsome edifices, built of Malta stone, and would present a much better appearance were they not so disfigured by projecting balconies of wood painted black or of a dark colour and filled with small glass windows. Some of the houses particularly the porticos in the different "auberges" are splendid, adorned with sculptures and of chaste architecture.

I took two or three rides into the country once in a *caleche* which is a queer one horse vehicle whose driver no matter how fast may be your pace runs beside you. I think the Island and every thing about it to be something very unique and to have properties peculiar only to itself. The shape of the houses, the dress of the people, the face of the country and the Island itself all seem adapted to one another and to nothing else. The ground is generally rather low and there is no high land to be noticed in the Island. Every inch of what soil there is is cultivated and to its utmost extent and what there is is exceedingly fertile. I have been gravely informed that soil has been brought from Sicily, but I very much doubt whether there is a foot of ground here of Sicilian soil.

Seven miles from Malta or rather La Valetta as the City is called is Citta Vechio, the ancient capital of the Isle. Here is St. Paul's church and under it the cave where you are informed St. Paul lived while enjoying the hospitality of Publius, the Governor, here, for three months. The cave is quite small and has in it a fine statue of St. Paul. Fossil remains of animals are found here and one is pestered continually to purchase teeth and I know not what else of animals etc. found or at least said to be found here. The Church itself is nothing. Near it are the catacombs or subterraneous sepulchures of the ancient inhabitants of

this city. They are dug in the soft rock which abounds here and after descending a little you can wander, if one may credit the account of the guide, for miles through these narrow passages lined on both sides with tombs or hollows cut in the rocks but all now empty. Not a bone is found. A quarter of an hour sufficed for me here who care more for what things now are than what they may have been.

There are some gardens near here one of which adjoining the old Governor's Palace at St. Antoine is well worth seeing, having many fine fountains of water and many beautiful plants. I ate here some excellent oranges for which Malta is famous. In the City itself there is but little to see. There is the armory which contains 16,000 stand of arms for the troops besides much of the ancient armour and implements of war used by the Knights of Malta in former days, some of which is very curious. Among other things there is one of the first cannon which were used, being made of bars of iron bound together by ropes, and is considering its materials a very respectable looking piece of ordinance. Some of the armor of the Knights, particularly that of some of the grand masters, is very beautifully wrought, the iron or steel being inlaid with elaborate figures in gold. On one of the suits of armor were the prints of musket bullets which had left no other mark than a dent, showing the strength of the armor. It was an exertion for me to lift one of the helmets to my head, much more to wear it, leaving me to conjecture what must be the strength of these men who could wear and go through so much fatigue in battle with a complete suit on. In one part of the room are shown arms etc. taken from the Turks. This armory is on the whole very curious and well worth seeing. It is in the Palace of the Governor, formerly of the Grand Master, which is an immense and noble edifice. In this Palace is at present the Protestant church, but a large and handsome one is now being erected which will be much better as the present one is insufficient. The Church of St. John though is exceedingly unpretending on the outside, is very remarkable within — although Napoleon with his usual rapacity seized all the ornaments and things of value he could find and from this church in particular carried away much treasure. Still it is very beautiful. The whole floor of this Cathedral is covered with the slabs of the tombs of the knights beautifully worked their arms and inscriptions and emblematical figures in Mosaic of marble, so that the pavement presents a novel and variegated appearance, being completely composed of them. Some of the monuments to the Grand Masters here are magnificent, besides which there are some good paintings. The only thing of value which escaped the eyes of the French here was a railing around one of the altars of silver which was saved by being painted over. A very strange thing it was that the three vessels sent from here to France by Napoleon with the treasures he had plundered were all lost and not a share (?) of the riches obtained here reached its destination. The Maltese called it a miracle.

There is little else to see here but the fortifications which are immense and would require thirty thousand men to man them, whereas they have but little over three thousand. Some of them are noble works.

The Maltese women wear a black silk mantilla on the head and dress in dark colors, copied from the Spanish I suppose. I do not like the costume how-

ever. You would laugh to hear the Maltese talk. The language is a kind of Arabic, and is one of the oddest sounding languages I have ever heard. Italian is spoken too by everyone here but it is a kind peculiar to themselves and I much doubt its passing within Italy.

There are some fine promenades on the Bastions of the fortification here overlooking the harbour. Here are tombs of some distinguished characters and I much admire the site of them, particularly of military characters who here rest among scenes with which their lives have been familiar. These are favorite places too of resort on fine evenings and one can walk here enjoying their delicious climate and hear the music from one or two bands which play here and see too all the beauty and fashion of the town.

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