

French Family Correspondence

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1862-1864



Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Revision Description

2020-09-04	Finding aid notes updated to new department standards. juliags
2021-06-02	LM Rozema added missing notes for an unprocessed collection (abstract, source, processing, bio), added FA title and filing titles, added FA date from EAD, and added component with instances previously attached to collection level.

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1989.102

Unit Date

1862-1864

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

Seven letters from brothers Elias French, Henry French, and John French, all serving in Company H, 11th New Hampshire Infantry during the American Civil War, written to family members from various camps and hospitals in Maryland, Kentucky, and Virginia. Elias French writes of food and reports seeing two balloons-- one bearing the Union Army's chief aeronaut Thaddeus S. C. Lowe, the other Confederate; John French writes from a Louisville, Kentucky, hospital, describing his wounds; Henry French mentions an increase in Confederate deserters.

Creator

French family

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

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Source of Acquisition

The French Family Correspondence was purchased by Special Collections and University Archives in two accruals, with six of the seven letters purchased in 1989; the seventh letter, dated April 4, 1864, was purchased in 1990.

Processing Information

The processing and description of the French Family Correspondence commenced and was completed in February, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], French Family Correspondence, Ms1989-102, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Brothers Henry, Elias, and John French, sons of Jesse and Anne Chamberlain French, were born in Sullivan County, New Hampshire. The 1850 federal census lists the brothers among the children living in the Plainfield home of their parents. John and Elias continue to be listed in their parents' home in 1860. Army enlistment records show all three brothers as residents of Enfield at the time of their enlistment in Company H, 11th New Hampshire Infantry during the American Civil War. All were mustered into service on September 2, 1862.

Henry French was born in 1833. The 1860 federal census lists French, a carpenter and joiner, and his wife Emma, 21, among the residents in the Enfield (Grafton County), New Hampshire home of Joseph B. Smith. French enlisted in Company H on August 20, 1862. He was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862 and was reduced to ranks May 26, 1863. On August 1, 1864, he was promoted to sergeant, having been unjustly reduced to ranks. He was appointed 1st lieutenant on June 1, 1865 but mustered out as sergeant on June 4, 1865. He is likely the Henry French described in the 1870 federal census as a 36-year-old carpenter living in Manchester, New Hampshire with presumed wife Emeline and two children. The 1880 federal census shows French, a carpenter, living in the Chicago home of his brother Frederick, together with brothers John and Elias, while Henry's wife and children remained in New Hampshire. He was still living in Chicago as late as 1891, but he died in Orford (Grafton County), New Hampshire on August 28, 1898. Henry French was buried in West Cemetery, Orford.

John French was born in Meridan, New Hampshire on February 25, 1838. By the time he enlisted in Company

H on August 12, 1862, he was employed as a machinist. He was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, and following a second wound was discharged due to disability at Louisville, Kentucky on January 13, 1864. In 1865, French moved to Pearson, Indiana. The following year, he married Libbie Perkins; the couple had one daughter, who died in infancy. Around 1869, the Frenches moved to Chicago, where John French worked as a foreman for Palmer & Fuller, a manufacturer of doors and sashes, for fifteen years; the 1880 census lists him as a widower, living in the Chicago home of his brother Frederick. Soon afterward, he moved to Edna, Kansas and became a stock dealer. Around 1892, he moved to Cherryville, where he operated a gun repair shop. In failing health, he retired from the gun repair shop, but entered into a short-lived partnership with W. J. Raymond to operate a grocery and general hardware store in 1903. John French died in Cherryville in November 1904. He was buried in Chicago.

Elias French was born in Meridan, New Hampshire on February 25, 1838. Like his twin brother John, Elias French enlisted on August 12, 1862. He was mustered out of the service on June 4, 1865. By 1891, French was living in Chicago, and he remained in Chicago through 1904, before returning to New Hampshire around 1905. The 1910 federal census lists Elias French, unmarried, among the residents in the Orford (Grafton County) home of his younger brother Fred; he was employed as a shop carpenter. Elias French died in Orford on July 12, 1933, and was buried in West Cemetery, Orford.

Scope and Content

The French Family Correspondence contains seven letters from three brothers who were soldiers in Company H, 11th New Hampshire Infantry during the American Civil War. The letters were all written to family members from various camps and hospitals in Maryland, Kentucky, and Virginia.

Writing from the barracks at Louisville, Kentucky on April 4, 1864, Henry French expresses his desire to rejoin his regiment and share their hardship and their duty "in putting down this rebellion." In a letter written September 12, 1864, he writes that he would like to be home to "get a few apples and a little cider" but predicts he will be home in another year and notes the many Confederate deserters that he has recently seen. After discussing news of family and mutual acquaintances, he lists the types of food that they have available to eat and asks for some things from home.

In two letters to his sister Mary, dated from Louisville on June 28 and December 14, 1863, John French writes of a recent leg wound and of some handkerchiefs that Mary had recently sent to brother Elias.

The collection also includes three letters from Elias French to his sister. In the first of these, written on 11th New Hampshire Infantry stationery from Pleasant Valley, Maryland on October 13, 1862, French discusses family and mutual acquaintances, then describes his breakfast ("Beans Coffee and McClelen [sic] Pies") and mentions other food available to the regiment: beef, griddle cakes, and pork. On December 29, 1862, French writes from a camp near Fredericksburg, Virginia, requesting some dried apples from home and reporting that he can see two balloons. "Prof Lowe is up looking at the Rebels in his," French writes, "and the other came from the South side of the River and I think it belongs to the Rebs it was up verry [sic] high and going towards Washington." In the third of these letters, written on United States Christian Commission stationery at Petersburg, Virginia on September 1, 1864, French writes of apples, melons, and the condition of his clothing.

Keywords

Civil War

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

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Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1862-1864

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