

Kelsey, Stephen R. Diary and Notes

Stephen R. Kelsey Diary and Notes

1865, 1920



Title Statement

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Revision Description

2020-09-09	Finding aid notes updated to new department standards. juliags
2021-06-23	LM Rozema added missing notes for an unprocessed collection (abstract, acquisition, processing info, bio), added FA title and filing title, added FA date from EAD, and added component with instances previously attached to collection level.

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1990.029

Unit Date

1865, 1920

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

Diary maintained by Stephen R. Kelsey between January and May, 1865, while in New York and Virginia with Battery I, 5th U. S. Artillery, during the American Civil War, with entries discussing the occupation of Petersburg, Virginia, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, and the capture of Jefferson Davis. Accompanied by a typescript biographical essay by Ernest Flint Kelsey, Stephen Kelsey's nephew, commenting on his uncle's military service.

Creator

Kelsey, Stephen R.

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Source of Acquisition

The Stephen R. Kelsey Diary and Notes were donated to Special Collections and University Archives in July and November 1990.

Processing Information

The processing and description of the Stephen R. Kelsey Diary and Notes commenced and was completed in September, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Stephen R. Kelsey Diary and Notes, Ms1990-029, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Stephen R. Kelsey, son of Truman and Laura Olin Kelsey, was born in Great Valley (Cattaraugus County), New York on January 6, 1848. According to the biographical notes in this collection, Kelsey had been placed under the guardianship of his older brother Kathalo following the 1856 death their mother, and Kathalo is likely the "R. Kelsey" in whose Great Valley home the 1860 census records Stephen as a resident. On May 30, 1862, at the age of 15, Kelsey enlisted as a private in Battery I, 5th United States Artillery. (His enlistment record lists his occupation simply as "laborer.") A note in Kelsey's diary states that he was wounded by a sharpshooter during the seige of Petersburg, Virginia on May 15, 1864. He remained with the 5th U. S. Artillery through the end of the war.

The 1870 federal census lists a 22-year-old native of New York named S. R. Kelsey living in Centropolis (Franklin County), Kansas, and employed as a blacksmith. On August 27 of that year, Kelsey married Lizzie/Elizabeth Reed (1850-1917) in Franklin County. Their first child, Albert R. Kelsey, was born October 5. The 1875 Kansas state census shows Lizzie Kelsey living in the Franklin County home of her parents, together with two Kelsey children. A third Kelsey child would be born in Franklin County that same year. By 1876, however, the family had apparently moved to Huron County, Michigan, where their youngest child, Anna, was born the following year. No further record of Stephen R. Kelsey could be found. In the 1880 census, Lizzie Kelsey, 30, appears as a married domestic servant living in the Ottawa (Franklin County), Kansas home of Isaac and Elizabeth Hetrick; her children, meanwhile, seem to have been adopted by other families. Elizabeth Kelsey married Philander Fletcher Lutton in Franklin County, Kansas on March 16, 1884; the couple had one child.

Scope and Content

This collection contains a diary maintained by Stephen R. Kelsey, a private in Company I, 5th United States Artillery during the American Civil War. The diary entries commence on January 1, 1865, with Kelsey apparently writing from the general hospital at Troy [New York]. Soon thereafter, he writes of being transferred to the front at Fort Fisher, Virginia, and briefly describes his route and the ship on which he

travels. Kelsey comments daily on the weather and activities in camp, noting weather conditions, proximity to the enemy, and nearby shelling and firing, and notes his battery's transfer to Fort Samson, then to Fort McGilvory. He frequently mentions the tasks he is assigned, particularly building quarters at the fort. He reports on soldiers executed for desertion and bounty-jumping, trading between the lines, seeing Confederate prisoners and deserters, and cheering along the lines in response to war news. He describes at length the Battle of Fort Stedman on March 25 and its aftermath: "[L]ook in any direction and you see signs of the recent struggle knapsacks haversacks canteens guns and equipment all kinds of clothing shot shell dead & wounded are scattered everywhere." He reports on the Confederate abandonment of Petersburg a few days later and on being in the first artillery battery to enter the city. He relays news of Lee's surrender and the resulting celebration, of Lincoln's assassination ("I am now one of the souths bitterest enemies"), Jefferson Davis's capture, and John Wilkes Booth's death. In early May, Kelsey chronicles his battery's move to northern Virginia. The entries conclude with Kelsey's discharge on May 30, 1865. Also included in the collection is a two-page, typescript essay by Kelsey's nephew, Ernest Flint Kelsey, providing further information on Kelsey's military service and commentary on the diary's contents.

Keywords

Civil War

Petersburg (Va.) -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

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

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

Existence and Location of Copies

The collection has been digitized and is available online.

Rights Statement for Archival Description

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Description of Subordinate Components

Diary and notes

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