

# Carnahan, John Newton, Letters

John Newton Carnahan Letters

1861-1862



## Title Statement

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## Profile Description

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## Descriptive Summary

### Unit ID

Ms.2009.112

### Unit Date

1861-1862

### Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

### Abstract

The collection includes American Civil War letters from Private John Newton Carnahan of the 54th Virginia Infantry to his wife, Juliette Sophia Calfee Carnahan, and children in Pulaski County, Virginia.

### Creator

Carnahan, John Newton, 1824-1862

### 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 John Newton Carnahan Letters were donated to Special Collections and University Archives in 2005 by John Anderson Carnahan of Columbus, Ohio, and Julie May Hill of Norfolk, Virginia.

## Processing Information

The processing, arrangement and description of the John Newton Carnahan Letters commenced and was completed in August 2009.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], John Newton Carnahan Letters, Ms2009-112, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

# Biographical Note

John Newton Carnahan, son of John A. and Elizabeth Bailie Carnahan, was born on December 29, 1824, in an area of Wythe County, Virginia that later became part of Pulaski County. On March 4, 1845, Carnahan married Juliette Sophia Calfee (1826-1909). The couple had six children (Margaret, Edwin, John A., Mary Ellen and Letitia P.) and owned a farm on the south side of the New River.

During the American Civil War Carnahan enlisted in Company F, 54th Virginia Infantry of the Confederate Army at Newbern, Virginia on September 9, 1861. He seems to have remained with the regiment until he fell ill in Russell County, Virginia the following spring. Family tradition holds that Juliette brought her husband to the family's Pulaski County home, where he died on July 25, 1862. (Curiously, however, Carnahan's published obituary states that he died in Russell County.)

# Administrative History

The 54th Virginia Infantry of the Confederate Army was organized by Colonel Robert C. Trigg in Southwest Virginia during the late summer and early fall of 1861 during the American Civil War. Mustered into service on September 10, the regiment trained at Camp Hall in Montgomery County before joining the Army of Eastern Kentucky. The 54th participated in battles at Middle Creek (Kentucky) and Princeton ((West) Virginia) in 1862, then returned to Southwest Virginia for several months before being ordered east late in the year. The regiment participated in the Battle of Kelly's Store in January 1863, then was transferred to the Army of East Tennessee. The 54th saw action at the battles of Chickamauga and Missionary Ridge before participating in Johnston's Atlanta Campaign and Hood's Tennessee Campaign in 1864. Afterward, Trigg and a detachment returned to Southwest Virginia, while the remainder of the regiment found itself participating in the Carolina Campaign at war's end.

# Scope and Content

This collection contains 16 letters written by John Newton Carnahan, a private in Company F, 54th Virginia Infantry, during the Civil War. Dated from camps in Southwest Virginia and eastern Kentucky, the letters are addressed to Carnahan's wife, Juliette Sophia Calfee Carnahan, and children at home in Pulaski County, Virginia.

Carnahan's letters focus largely on personal matters, instructing his children in good behavior and offering his wife counsel on the management of their farm and the sale of produce. He relays news of mutual acquaintances, makes frequent mention of his religious faith, and continually writes of a deep homesickness while pleading for more letters from home. Carnahan notes camp conditions and initially claims his health is much improved by army life, citing the weight he has gained while in service. In later letters, however, he increasingly complains of bowel trouble and states that he is suffering from "colery [cholera] morbus," which today would be diagnosed as acute gastroenteritis.

Departing from personal matters in his letter of December 15, 1861, Carnahan describes the aftermath of what was probably the Battle of Ivy Mountain, Kentucky, though his casualty figures do not match those in the historical record. On January 17, 1862, he briefly writes of the Battle of Middle Creek, Kentucky, in which his regiment had participated a week earlier. Carnahan describes the Middle Creek battle again in a letter dated February 3, 1862, when he also provides a lengthy account of the regiment's movements since the previous November.

Following a three-month gap, the collection resumes with a letter dated May 9, 1862. Not in Carnahan's own hand, this letter and another dated May 21 were dictated, perhaps to his cousin Mary Aston, and find the soldier in ill health in Dickensonville, Virginia.

## Related Materials

VT Special Collections and University Archives has the following related book in the Rare Book Collection: Weaver, Jeffrey C., *54th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, 1993). Call no. E581.5 54th W44 1993 c.2 Civil War Spec.

## Keywords

Civil War

Local/Regional History and Appalachian South

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

Confederate States of America. Army. Virginia Infantry Regiment, 54th

## Existence and Location of Copies

This collection, including the transcripts, has been digitized and is available online.

## Rights Statement for Archival Description

The guide to the John Newton Carnahan Letters by Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, is licensed under a CC0 (<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/public-domain/cc0/>).

## Arrangement

The collection is arranged chronologically.

## Description of Subordinate Components

### Letters

**Unit Date** 1861-1862

**folder** 1

#### **Camp Hall [Montgomery County, Virginia]**

**Unit Date** Oct 7, 1861

#### **Camp Hall [Montgomery County, Virginia]**

**Unit Date** Oct 27, 1861

#### **Wytheville [Virginia]**

**Unit Date** Nov 10, 1861

#### **Tazewell County, Virginia**

**Unit Date** Nov 15, 1861

**Camp near Cedar Bluff [Tazewell County, Virginia]**

**Unit Date** Nov 1861

**Floyd County, Kentucky**

**Unit Date** Dec 15, 1861

**Paint Ville [Paintsville], Kentucky**

**Unit Date** Dec 21, 1861

**Paint Ville [Paintsville], Kentucky**

**Unit Date** Dec 22, 1861

**Paint Ville [Paintsville], Kentucky**

**Unit Date** Jan 5, [1862]

**Camp on Beaver Creek [Kentucky]**

**Unit Date** Jan 17, [1862]

**Letcher County, Kentucky**

**Unit Date** Jan 26, 1862

**[Pound Gap, Kentucky?]**

**Unit Date** Feb 3, 1862

**Camp Cassel Wood [Castlewood] - Russell County, Virginia**

**Unit Date** Feb 14, 1862

**Camp Cassel Wood [Castlewood] - Russell County, Virginia**

**Unit Date** Feb 16, 1862

**[Dickensonville, Virginia?]**

**Unit Date** May 9, 1862

**[Dickensonvill[e], [Virginia]**

**Unit Date** May 21, 1862