

Leonard, William A. Papers

William A. Leonard Papers,
1864-1865



Title Statement

Leonard, William A. Papers William A. Leonard Papers, 1864-1865 Ms.2011.106

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Publication Statement

Publisher: Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries (0434)
560 Drillfield Drive
Newman Library, Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
Business Number: 540-231-6308
specref@vt.edu
URL: <http://spec.lib.vt.edu>



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Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-03-25 08:45:00 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Revision Description

2025-03-24 Ella Winterling added Existence of Location and Copies.

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2011.106

Unit Date

1864-1865

Language

English .

Abstract

The collection includes William A. Leonard's letters home from February-July 1865, as well as his diary from August 1864-April 1865. Leonard served as an ambulance driver in and around the siege at Petersburg, which is the focus of his short diary entries. His early letters focus on war news and rumors, daily life, and news from home. Post-surrender letters emphasize Leonard's experiences while stationed around Washington, DC, daily life (including the growing frustrations of soldiers wanting to get home) and his complaint's about the rumors and delays of his regiment's discharge.

Creator

Leonard, William A., b.1843(?)

Extent

0.2 Cubic Feet 1 box

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

Permission to publish material from William A. Leonard Papers must be obtained from Special Collections, Virginia Tech.

Acquisition Information

William A. Leonard's diary was purchased by Special Collections in July 2011. A group of Leonard's correspondence from 1865 was purchased by Special Collections in September 2011. Additional correspondence from 1864 and 1865 was purchased by Special Collections in December 2011.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the William A. Leonard Papers was completed in November 2011. Additional processing and description was completed in December 2011.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: William A. Leonard Papers, Ms2011-106, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

William A. Leonard was born about 1843 to Joel A. (b.1817) and Sophia Leonard (1816-d. before 1880). His parents were both natives of Vermont who moved to Massachusetts. William and his two sisters, Leonora (b. abt. 1852; and who William calls "Nora" in his letters and is later listed as "Mary" in a least one set of census records) and Roselia (b. abt. 1859) were all born in Great Barrington, Berkshire County.

It is unknown what line of work William Leonard was in prior to the war, though he was living at home with his family. He was drafted into service in July 1863 for a three year term with Company F, 16th Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry. In mid-July 1864, the 16th Infantry mustered out. Existing veterans and recruits, Leonard included, were transferred to the 11th Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry. From at least August of 1864 until Lee's surrender, Leonard served as an ambulance driver, transporting wounded from battlefield to hospital. His unit spent nearly a year in and around Petersburg. While stationed outside Washington, DC, waiting to muster out, Leonard also drove civilians in and around the city. He particularly makes mention of taking family members to hospitals to get news of soldiers.

Leonard returned home to Great Barrington in July 1865. In 1880, he was living at home with his father, Leonora and her husband, and Leonora's brother-in-law. At the time, he was employed at a woolen mill. In 1894, he purchased a plumbing and steam fitting business from a former employer. Later census records suggest he was married to a woman named Hattie (probably Henrietta; b. abt. 1863), but it is unknown when. They had daughter, Nellie, in June 1897.

Sources:

- Ancestry.com
- [Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System](#), National Park Service.
- [The Metal Worker](#), vol. XLI, January to June 1894. New York: David Williams, 1894. Via Google Books, November 2011.

Scope and Content

The collection includes William A. Leonard's letters home from February-July 1865, as well as his diary from August 1864-April 1865. Leonard served as an ambulance driver in and around the siege at Petersburg, which is the focus of his short diary entries. His early letters focus on war news and rumors, daily life, and news from home. Letters following Lee's surrender emphasize Leonard's experiences while stationed around Washington, DC, daily life (including the growing frustrations of soldiers wanting to get home) and his complaint's about the rumors and delays of his regiment's discharge and payment.

All the letters in this collection were written home to Leonard's parents, usually his mother. He continually

reassures her not to worry about him, requests various things from home (especially stamps), and talks about his daily life. He frequently writes about plans for when he gets home. Leonard's religious sentiments also recur throughout his correspondence. He also includes war news and who he has seen, though he reveals his priorities and lack of interest in being a soldier, saying in March 1865:

we have got a good man to steer the machine, that fellow they call U. S. Grant. Sheridan & Sherman are giving them fits. I have seen Grant & Mede a number of times this summer I had a great deal rather see you + Pa. I dont want to see Nora because she wanted me to go soldiering

Although battle descriptions are not necessarily the focus of Leonard's letters, his 1864 correspondence contains details of being fired upon at Petersburg, of picket duty, and later, of transporting injured men. In June 1865, he writes several letters detailing the sight of unburied dead men and horses and the sound of fighting from the front at Petersburg. In May 1865, he writes of the incompetence of the doctors:

The Doctors here dont have any thing fit to give any one and the biggest of them dont know how to doctor a hen anyway. They take the wounded men legs and arms off half the time. when there is no need of it, do it practice there has been a number of times I have heard of that...The Doct of the Regt was a clerk in an apothecary shop...

Leonard's diary begins in August 1864, apparently when he was appointed to drive an ambulance. His entries are short and refer mostly to his daily activities: who or what he was conveying to and from the hospital at City Point outside Petersburg; what letters he sent or received; war news; or when he attended religious meetings. Shortly before the diary ends in April 1865, he notes the firing of guns and cannons "for the death of abram Lincoln President of the U.S. who was shot by a man by the name of Booth." He refers to the death of Lincoln and its effect on the soldiers in several letters, as well. Leonard's own correspondence suggests he kept a previous diary--in August 1864, he inquires if his mother has received the one he sent home--but it is unknown if this diary still exists.

Please note: Transcripts of the correspondence are available in the collection.

Keywords

Civil War

Folk, historical, and patent medicine

Medicine

Medicine, Military -- History

Petersburg (Va.) -- History -- Siege, 1864-1865

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

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

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

Existence and Location of Copies

Some of this collection has been digitized and is available online.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged by material type. Correspondence is in chronological order.

Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1864

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Correspondence

Unit Date February-May 1865

box-folder 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Correspondence**Unit Date** June-July 1865**box-folder** 1 (box)**Container** 3 (folder)**Diary****Unit Date** 1864-1865**box-folder** 1 (box)**Container** 4 (folder)**Transcripts (Correspondence)****box-folder** 1 (box)**Container** 5 (folder)**Scope and Content**

A note about transcripts: Letters are transcribed with original spelling and grammar. Numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the letter. Unreadable words are replaced with a question mark. Uncertain words are in parentheses with a question mark. In general, no additional information was added, except in rare cases where a correct spelling of a name could be supplied, aiding in future research.